

SPIRIT AND BODY, HEART AND SOUL:  
EXPLORING STUDENT NARRATIVES  
THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION IN EXILE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Refugee higher education, as a subset of the larger education in emergencies field, has been rapidly growing since the 2000s. However, a deeper exploration of student experiences is needed to critically understand the potentially transformative aspects of higher education. Responding to this gap, this research draws on fieldwork data collected in Amman, Jordan in summer 2016. It aims to interrogate how higher education can open avenues for alternative narratives for refugee students. The uptake of higher education by refugees challenges discursively limiting representations by giving students an avenue through which they can connect to their own pasts and futures, while also transforming their present lived experiences. A feminist lens is used to draw attention to the racialized and gendered differences among students' experiences. By re-centering discussions of refugee higher education around students themselves, this research is intended to help better align development praxis to flow from this crucial starting point.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

BHER	Borderless Higher Education for Refugees
BMZ	German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
JC:HEM	Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
ORAT	Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
RONGO	Royal Nongovernmental Organization
SADR	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
SRF	Scholar Rescue Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organization
WUSC	World University Service of Canada



## **CHAPTER 1: FRAMING REFUGEE HIGHER EDUCATION IN JORDAN**

Since the 1990s, scholars have pointed to the limitations in the ways in which refugees are discursively represented through humanitarian intervention. In the quotation below, Malkki (1996) highlights how humanitarianism universalizes ‘the refugee experience’ into one aggregate narrative, separating individuals from their historical and political conditions:

One important effect of the bureaucratized humanitarian interventions that are set in motion by large population displacements is to leach out the histories and the politics of specific refugees’ circumstances ... This dehistoricizing universalism creates a context in which it is difficult for people in the refugee category to be approached as historical actors rather than simply as mute victims. (Malkki, 1996, p. 378)

These processes serve to silence individuals in exile, taking away their abilities to give narratives on their own lives. Limbu (2009) argues for the importance of “find[ing] alternative narratives that provide different perspectives on the refugee experience” (p. 257). The research for this thesis is a response to this call, in the context of refugee higher education.

Higher education, as a subset of the larger education in emergencies field, has increasingly come to the forefront in refugee humanitarian intervention since the 2000s. As situations of displacement have become increasingly protracted, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have recognized the need to move beyond ‘relief’ frameworks of aid provision in intervention to long-term models of development (Crea, 2016). In this shift, education is increasingly viewed as the ‘fourth pillar’ of humanitarian work, alongside food and water, shelter, and healthcare (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Sinclair, 2001). Beyond being recognized as a basic human right, education in emergencies provides a wide range of functions, including psychosocial support, skill and moral development, community development, and physical and

social protection (Sinclair, 2001). However, higher education alone is recognized for the transformative potential it holds for individuals' lives. It is intended to better equip individuals and communities with the tools needed for long-term human development. Higher education, then, can create an avenue through which refugees can overcome reliance on short-term forms of intervention in 'emergency' situations.

Bridging these two areas of inquiry – refugee representation and higher education – this research aims to interrogate how higher education can open up avenues for alternative narratives for refugee students in Amman, Jordan. I understand the changing of these alternative narratives to be a formative part of representations, and thus closely link them in my research. To do so, I conducted in-depth interviews with current students or recent graduates from a higher education program in Amman. Critically, my research centers on student voices<sup>1</sup>. The objectives, then, are two-fold and interrelated: i) to understand the ways in which higher education can open new narratives for students, and the possibilities for empowerment therein, and ii) to conceptualize the relationship between students, higher education, and humanitarianism, and the implications of this relationship in student narratives.

Refugee humanitarian actors and some refugee studies scholars have been critiqued for erasing the unique political and historical processes related to exile, and instead amalgamating distinct characteristics of those in exile into one 'refugee story' (Malkki, 1995; Malkki, 1996). Even Limbu's call to find alternative narratives to 'the refugee experience' presupposes that there *is* a singular refugee experience to be deconstructed. To this end, I instead explore the multiplicity of student experiences in Amman, with the acknowledgment that these narratives are

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<sup>1</sup> See Donald (2014) and Khan & Hyndman (2015) for examples of student-centered research in migration studies.

partial, situated, and particular to the students with whom I spoke. I borrow the words of a key informant in the field, who said when speaking on the topic of higher education for refugee students in Amman, Jordan: “Education means different things to different people” (RSC representative 2). I take this to mean that understanding the value and role of education requires a contextual grounding of each individual’s trajectory. Thus, I examine the diversity of meanings that students ascribe to their experiences with higher education.

In the two sections of this chapter that follow, I provide relevant contextual information about the history of migration in Jordan, and how this history has shaped current governmental and humanitarian responses to groups in exile. I then review the methodological approaches used in this research, with a focus on the power relations inherent in research.

### **Contextualizing migration and humanitarianism in Jordan**

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is an Arab kingdom established in 1921 (Beck & Huser, 2015). Its population has expanded nearly 10% in recent years to 9.5 million, due mainly to the migration of Syrian refugees (Ghazal, 2016). Historically Jordan has been the sought-after place of refuge for many groups fleeing persecution, most notably Palestinians, Iraqis, and Syrians. These three major groups of refugees in Jordan have shaped how Jordan receives refugees today and its current humanitarian landscape. In addition, Jordan also currently hosts much smaller numbers of Sudanese, Somalian, Eritrean, and Yemeni refugees. I will briefly discuss the history of displacement of these various nationalities into Jordan, and its impact it on the current context of Jordan as a refugee-receiving nation-state. Also significant is the increasing numbers of urban refugees in Jordan, and the consequences of this phenomenon for humanitarian practices. Below, I briefly describe the migrations of the above-mentioned groups

of refugees to Jordan, and use this history as a springboard to examine current humanitarian practices in Jordan.



**Figure 1.1: Refugee producing countries in relation to Jordan. Map by Marissa Korda.**

### ***Palestinians: 1948, 1967, and 1990***

While Palestinians have had a long history of migration to Jordan dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they have sought refuge in Jordan in earnest at several more recent points in time following the 1948 war with Israel (in 1948, 1967, and 1990) (Stevens, 2013). Prior to the most recent Syrian displacement, Palestinians made up about half of the total Jordanian population of 6 million (Hejoj, 2007).

Palestinians are viewed as an ‘exceptional’ refugee group in the Middle East (Hejoj, 2007). Following the annexation of the West Bank by the Jordanian government in 1950, citizenship and nationality rights were extended to the majority of Palestinians, including refugees who had previously migrated to Jordan in 1948 (Farah, 2005). Despite this – and the pan-Arab<sup>2</sup> ethos that fuelled this extension of citizenship rights – the government has perceived Palestinians in Jordan as a threat to Jordanian nationalism.

These issues intensified following Jordan’s defeat in the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 (Schulz, 2003). This defeat led to the emergence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Jordan. The PLO operated as the symbol of Palestinian resistance and steadfastly refused to work with what was referred to as the Jordanian project of assimilation (Achilli, 2014). The active resistance enacted by the PLO, combined with continuation of Palestinian migration into Jordan led to drastic changes in the policies and attitudes of the government towards the Palestinian community (Schulz, 2003). These tensions, which came to a head during the civil war of 1970-1971 (known as ‘Black September’) culminated in the ejection of the PLO from Jordan (Hejoj, 2007). This period also marked a shift to the construction of a new national

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<sup>2</sup> Pan-Arabism refers to an ideological commitment of all Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa to unify as one nation (Achilli, 2014).

identity, no longer rooted in pan-Arabism, but instead in Islamic values and a loyalty to the Hashemite rule (Achilli, 2014). A project of unity and integration continued, but the discourse came to revolve around an integration *within* a guest/host framing of a relationship between Jordanians and Palestinians (Achilli, 2014), although the official rhetoric put forth by the government has continued to focus on unity and brotherhood between Palestinian Jordanians and native Jordanians (Hejoj, 2007). Indeed, the “primacy of a national identity was predicated upon the exclusion of the Palestinian ‘element’” (Achilli, 2014, p. 240). The failure of a pan-Arab nation led by Jordan necessitated a new ideological definition of the state, this time defined around the boundaries of the native Jordanian body.

The displacement of Palestinians to Jordan has profoundly shaped Jordan’s response towards future displaced groups. Achilli (2015) writes: “The association of ‘refugee’ with Palestinian, and hence with permanent residency, has patently distorted the discourse in Jordan” (p. 19). While refugees are considered ‘temporary’ visitors to the hosting state, the acknowledged lack of solutions regarding the Palestinian diaspora also signifies a permanence of refugees in Jordan.

### ***Iraqis: 2003 onwards***

Iraqis have also sought refuge in Jordan at a number of historical junctures: in 1958, the first major migration took place after the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy; between the 1960s and 1980s another migration occurred during the Iraqi Ba’athist regime; more migrations followed in 1979 during the Iran/Iraq war, and in 1990-1991 during the Gulf War (Stevens, 2013). Since the beginning of the Iraq War and the American invasion into Iraq in 2003, there has been a steady migration of Iraqis into Jordan. This most recent migration is most relevant to

the current context of Jordan. While in 2007, there were an estimated 500,000 Iraqis in Jordan, as of 2015 official estimates place the number at 50,000 (UNHCR, 2007; UNHCR, 2015a).

As with Palestinians coming to Jordan, the Jordanian government refused to use the term ‘refugee’ in relation to Iraqis in exile, but instead used the label ‘guest’ to define the status of the migrants. Indeed, fearing another permanent presence of refugees like the Palestinians, this guest/host framework became even more pronounced (Arar, 2016). Compared to Palestinians, many of whom continue to live in unofficial camps on the outskirts of Amman, Iraqis lived overwhelmingly in urban areas (Turner, 2015). Not having the option of claiming asylum, Iraqis received 60-day tourist visas upon arrival in Jordan (Arar, 2016). Those who could not afford to renew these visas pursued strategies of invisibility. Poorer Iraqis chose to live in urban areas as a strategy of protection against the possibility of refoulement, as they could hide more easily from authorities (Arar, 2016). Wealthier Iraqis, in contrast, also lived in urban areas, but as a matter of choice (Chatelard, 2010).

While some resources and humanitarian aid have been available to Iraqis, it has been grossly insufficient to respond to their needs (Stevens, 2013). This is attributed both to the straining of resources following Palestinian migration to Jordan and the lack of international attention to the Iraqi migration (due in large part to the Jordanian government’s framing of Iraqis as guests) (Arar, 2016; Turner, 2015).

### *Syrians: 2011 onwards*

Most recently, the Syrian civil war has led to 630,000 registered Syrians living in Jordan (UNHCR, 2016b). The initially welcome reception to Syrians was fuelled by the perception that the Syrian civil war would be short, and any strains on resources in Jordan were only temporary (Connable, 2015). As well, the tight cultural and geographical relationship between the two

countries made migration relatively easy (Achilli, 2015). Kinship and friendship ties, especially near the border, also acted as a pull factor into Jordan (Achilli, 2015). However, as the civil war in Syria has become increasingly prolonged, and the burden on Jordan's resources and infrastructure has weighed ever more heavily, the government made key border policy changes in July 2014 to heavily restrict migration (Achilli, 2015). Indeed, such policies have led to several instances of refoulement (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Central to ensuring international attention to 'the Syrian problem' are policies of encampment that have aimed to limit the mobility of Syrian refugees living in Jordan. Turner (2015) discusses how encampment policies in Jordan provide a way for the government to leverage the presence of Syrian refugees and make them more 'legible' to the international humanitarian community, and therefore generate foreign aid. While only 20% of Syrians are in refugee camps, these policies have nevertheless centered attention on Syrians in Jordan that would have been harder to maintain otherwise in urban areas (Turner, 2015).

### ***Sudanese, Somalians, Eritreans, and Yemenis: 2003 onwards***

The prominence of Palestinians, Iraqis, and Syrians in Jordan has obscured the much smaller numbers of refugees coming from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Yemen. This diversity is so often unnoticed in representations of those in exile in Jordan. An estimated 5,000 Sudanese are in Jordan as a result of the war in Darfur beginning in 2003 (ARDD, 2015). The number of Somalians in Jordan is smaller still, with estimates of 800 persons (ARDD, 2015). Sudanese and Somali refugees have experienced particularly intense marginalization in the Jordanian context. Both because of daily experiences of racialization in Jordan and because of the focus of humanitarian interest on more visible refugee groups, Sudanese and Somali refugees have exceptionally fewer resources and networks that they can access in comparison to Palestinian,



Iraqi, and Syrians. Somalians face heightened language barriers, given that Arabic (i.e. and not English) is often the second language for Somalians (ARDD, 2015).

In addition to Sudanese and Somali refugees, there are smaller numbers of refugees from Yemen and Eritrea. Following the conflict in Yemen, which began in 2015, an estimated 3,800 to 15,000 Yemenis have entered Jordan (ARDD, 2016). No official statistics exist to date, but key informants in the field estimated that there are less than 50 Eritreans in Jordan. I did not conduct any interviews with Eritrean or Yemeni refugees, as there were no students of these nationalities who met my fieldwork requirements. These fieldwork requirements are discussed later in the chapter.

### **The current context of migration and humanitarianism in Jordan**

Despite the presence of diverse and long-standing refugee groups, Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, nor the 1967 Protocol, and has no national legislation pertaining to the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees (UNHCR, 2010). There is no domestic law speaking to the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees (Stevens, 2013). As discussed above, the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in Jordan has been within a guest/host framework (Kattan, 2015). This unofficial and unlegislated framework of refugees highlights a central paradox in the Jordanian state's behaviour towards refugees: despite the volume of asylum seekers in Jordan, the government has avoided any formal agreements relating to these communities (Achilli, 2014). Indeed, this absence of legislation is particularly salient when one notes that Jordan has 700,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers (not including Palestinian-Jordanians), with unofficial numbers almost certainly running much higher (UNHCR, 2016a).

Jordan's refusal to codify any sort of legal framework has enacted particularly precarious conditions for the refugees there. Even though Jordan has a good reputation worldwide for accepting large numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries, it has also committed profound human rights violations, such as the deportation of an estimated 800 Sudanese refugees to Sudan in December 2015<sup>3</sup>, and the sealing off of the Syrian-Jordanian border (known as 'the Berm') in June 2016.<sup>4</sup>

Jordan's geographical location has made it sensitive or vulnerable at times to the demands of other political actors, but it has also given the government a tool with which to attract foreign aid (Beck & Huser, 2015). Since its creation, Jordan has depended heavily on this foreign aid, first from the UK, and later from the USA and EU states (as well as Arab oil-producing states) (Beck & Huser, 2015). In recent years, foreign aid has been provided by western states to support refugee initiatives in Jordan (discussed further below). Aid from the US has been particularly important, with support reaching "unparalleled levels since the 1990s" (Yom, 2015, p. 296). In 2013, for example, the total amount of American foreign aid received by Jordan reached 13.83 billion US dollars (Beck & Huser, 2015). Unlike the aid collected by the Jordanian government from other countries (for example, Saudi Arabia), American aid has been more consistent and less frequently tied to specific aid projects, giving Jordan an increased flexibility in its use (Yom, 2015). What it *has* been tied to, however, is "Jordanian foreign policy's continuing pro-Western orientation" (Yom, 2015, p. 296), as evidenced by the rise of

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<sup>3</sup> Following protests by the Sudanese community outside of the UNHCR headquarters in Jordan, Jordanian authorities deported 800 Sudanese in December 2015 (Pizzi & Williams, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The sealing of the Syrian-Jordanian border cut off crucial humanitarian aid to the 75,000 Syrians there, and has left them unable to seek asylum in Jordan (Amnesty International, 2016).

their economic liberalization policies and refugee intakes, keeping migration a safe distance from western countries.

Beck & Huser (2015) argue that “the flow of rent revenues [in Jordan] contributes significantly to regime stability” (p. 83), and draw a correlation to the markedly lower rents<sup>5</sup> collected by Egypt and Tunisia and the political instability seen in these countries. Thus, the collection of financial aid through the conduit of the Syrian refugees that Jordan is currently hosting is embedded in a larger, ongoing survival strategy by the state to collect the foreign aid that it needs to continue to support itself. These processes have been exacerbated by the dearth of natural and economic resources in Jordan, further increasing the reliance on loans, international aid, and remittances (Kattan, 2015).

Governmental regulations, including excess administrative oversight, the proliferation of royal nongovernmental organizations (RONGOs), and the centralization of activities, have imposed political limits to the activities that can be undertaken by civil society actors in Jordan (Wiktorowicz, 2002). National NGOs that are not RONGOs go through multiple stages of approval for all refugee-related activities, which may take months, and is more stringent for internationally funded projects) (Kattan, 2015). All projects must be approved by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, where processes are lengthy and unclear (Achilli, 2015). Further, there is an unwritten rule that all refugee assistance projects must also benefit at least 25-30% of the local Jordanian population (sometimes going up to 50%) (Kattan, 2015). Finally, Achilli (2015) links the increasingly stringent encampment policies for Syrians with a shrinking of humanitarian space. Governmental security concerns partly explain increasing restrictions on

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<sup>5</sup> Beck & Huser (2015) define rents as “incomes that are not balanced by labor and capital, and are thus at the free disposal of the recipient” (p. 88), and refer primarily to income gained through foreign aid to the Jordanian state.

humanitarian activities since 2011, a date that marks both the beginning of Syrian migration into Jordan and the Arab Spring protests (Achilli, 2015). However, the impact of such policies has been to limit the ability of humanitarian actors to serve vulnerable populations. Achilli (2015) also points to the decreasing levels of trust refugees have towards humanitarian actors in Jordan.

Despite these restrictions and limitations, I was struck by the diversity of activities among the humanitarian actors that addressed post-secondary education needs for refugees: among many other examples, there is the Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF), connecting threatened scholars with visiting appointments in other countries; several programs providing vocational skills training to youth in camps; and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)'s master's scholarship program for Syrians and Jordanians.

In the context of camps on the Thai-Burma border, Purkey (2010) points out the importance of collaboration among civil society actors in supporting higher education initiatives for refugees. In the context of Iraq, Rasheed & Munoz (2016) highlight the need to improve communication among different implementing actors, including the application of a systemic communal lens that does not narrowly focus only on higher education, but also considers long-term planning. Indeed, the findings from these scholars are also relevant in the context of Jordan, where projects are often characterized by a lack of long-term planning and communication among actors. Humanitarian workers with whom I spoke were aware of this, but pointed to limitations in resources and government support. There was an inter-agency working group for NGOs that focused on post-secondary education for refugees in Jordan. The goal of this working group was to partake in collective activity mapping and coordination, as well as communication with government bodies. However, coordination of many different actors created new challenges, and this working group was still in the process of establishing itself when I left.

## Context selection

I conducted my fieldwork research in Amman, Jordan from June 2016 to August 2016. During this time, I held an internship with the non-governmental organization Refugee Support Centre<sup>6</sup> (RSC). This is a Christian American-based international NGO that focuses on principles of accompaniment in its support of vulnerable refugee groups. The key principle of accompaniment means that the RSC's activities center on building interpersonal relationships with individuals served by the NGO. In Jordan, RSC runs an office and school in Amman and serves only urban refugees. While almost all refugee-supporting NGOs in Jordan provide services only to Syrians, RSC serves refugees of all nationalities. RSC also serves marginalized Jordanians, as governmental policies stipulate that humanitarian resources must be allocated to Jordanians in addition to refugees or migrants.

In 25 locations around the world, including Amman, RSC implements a higher education project. This project is a blended learning 3 year diploma program based on the content of an American university. All course materials are in English. This liberal studies program is comprised of a range of courses, such as science, philosophy, and writing. In the final year of the program, students specialize in teaching, administration, or social work. Students take one course at time, each course lasting 3 months. In Amman, students were required to come to the school twice a week for in-person classes, which functioned as tutorials for the material that they accessed online. Students receive a diploma after completion of the program. The credits gained while in Jordan can theoretically be transferred to another university post-resettlement, although a RSC representative told me that there have been reports of students who were unable to do so (RSC representative 2).

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<sup>6</sup> This is a pseudonym for the organization.

In addition to the diploma program, the higher education project also includes a more general post-secondary education stream. This stream is designed to enhance local vocational education by developing site-specific content. These courses vary according to location; in Amman, English language and psychosocial case management courses were offered. The English courses were most often used as stepping stones for students to improve their English to an appropriate level for the diploma program. I have purposely only included students in the 3 year diploma program, recognizing the differences between skills based education of the vocational program and the critical thinking aspects of the diploma program.

Given Jordan's longstanding history as a hosting country for refugees in the region, the rapid scaling up of humanitarian organizations in Jordan, and in particular the burgeoning number of higher education for refugee projects, this location was well suited for my research topic. Moreover, the RSC diploma program has been in operation in Jordan since 2012, meaning that there were some graduates and students in their later stages of studying. This was significant for me as I was most interested in understanding student experiences either post-graduation, or at these later stages of the education process.

As well, RSC Jordan operates only in Amman, and serves urban refugees. Given the logistical and ethical issues of doing research in camps in Jordan, it made most sense to research the experiences of students in an urban setting. Furthermore, over 80% of refugees in Jordan live in non-camp settings, but given the relative lack of visibility of urban refugees, comparatively less research has been done in this context (Turner, 2015). This lack of research is particularly striking as living in urban areas creates additional difficulties for many refugees, including the

need to find work.<sup>7</sup> (often illegally and in precarious circumstances) to pay for the rising cost of living in Amman.

Finally, RSC is unique among almost all the NGOs I encountered in Jordan, in that it serves refugees regardless of nationality. This created a cosmopolitan refugee school environment not present anywhere else in Jordan, and allowed for a critical examination of nationality from an intersectional perspective. While guided by practical constraints, the particularities of RSC created rich avenues for research, responding to multiple gaps in the literature surrounding higher education for refugees.

My decision to intern with and research this particular project was guided primarily by reasons of access. I was able to secure an internship with RSC in March of 2016 through my affiliation with York University. Officially, I was designated the Monitoring & Evaluation Intern. In practice, my duties were wide ranging in ways that allowed me to be more deeply immersed in both the school community and larger humanitarian community than would have been possible otherwise.

## **The RSC school**

In conceptualizing the RSC school, I draw on Massey's (2005) definition of space "as the product of interrelations" where "distinct trajectories coexist" (p. 9). This conceptualization emphasizes the multiplicity of space, and the ways in which relationships are constantly reconstituted. This conceptualization is useful in understanding the impacts of the school's spatial configurations on the students. The school is the site in which students, with their

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<sup>7</sup> Syrians are the only nationality of refugee currently in Jordan who are legally allowed to obtain work permits (ILO, 2015a). However, the cost of obtaining work permits and the lack of regulation in the industries that Syrians *do* most often work in in Jordan (construction, manufacturing, and agriculture) mean that in practice, the vast majority of Syrians work illegally (ILO, 2015a; ILO, 2015b; Turner, 2015).

particular historical trajectories, meet and encounter other students and humanitarian actors. The interplay between these different people can open avenues for student identities to be both contested and reproduced.

The school is about a ten-minute walk from the main RSC office, where the office administrators work. This main office is located at a bustling intersection with several shopping complexes. The school is situated on a quiet street behind the Christian centre affiliated with the RSC, a place that is easily missed as it is tucked behind a set of wire gates and a plain, white façade (see image 1.2). Finding the school requires that the visitor knows to walk around a small garden to the left of the main building (see image 1.3), and then down a second staircase (see image 1.4). As with many NGO buildings I visited in Amman, the complicated, hidden entrance to the school ensures that the visitor must be knowledgeable about the place that he or she is visiting – strangers are implicitly not welcome<sup>8</sup>.

Based on my observations, I perceive the school as follows: It is part of the urban landscape around it, yet simultaneously separated from it. Even as the school is located in a busy part of the city core, it is a peaceful oasis away from it. This conceptualization is my starting point for understanding how students are able to exercise their agency at the school. As I will discuss further in chapter 3, students felt constrained by factors outside of their control in their day-to-day lives in Amman. At the school, however, students felt more able to exercise agency, particularly through processes of claiming the school as home. This separation of place is part of how the community of RSC was able to constitute itself: the physical separation of the school was instrumental in making students feel safe and ‘at home’ here. However, this separation of

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<sup>8</sup> A RSC representative told me he had an unofficial policy of keeping school details – including the building address – private as a way of mitigating the vulnerability many of the refugee students there faced (RSC representative 2).



space also meant that ‘western’ influence was far more salient than it is in other areas students from the school may frequent. The form of American education at RSC is tied to a particular ‘western’ ethos that can create tensions among the student community, to be discussed further in chapter 3.



**Image 1.2: Photo shows the gated entrance to the RSC centre and from the main street. Photo courtesy of Maher Ghalyoun.**



**Image 1.3:** Photo shows the pathway around the RSC centre to access the school centre behind it. Photo courtesy of Maher Ghalyoun.



**Image 1.4:** Photo shows the staircase down to the school centre behind the RSC centre. Photo courtesy of Maher Ghalyoun.

## **Methods and Methodology**

### **My role as researcher**

As a Canadian student arriving in Jordan to work at the very organization I was conducting research on, I was already entrenched in multiple pre-existing power relations. My internship with RSC was the very reason I was able to have access to this case study for my research, but also impacted the kinds of relationships I developed with students (discussed further below in this chapter). As I later learned, students had a wide and mixed range of experiences with western researchers at RSC. In one interview, Hazim told me that when he began his studies at RSC, he had difficult experiences with Americans he had met there, and thus had a distaste for dealing with American researchers. In another interview, Taifa expressed frustration with various western researchers and humanitarian workers she had met in Jordan, who had offered to help her apply for scholarship programs, but later withdrew these offers. However, students also expressed very positive experiences with previous researchers and humanitarian workers. Reza told me about his favourable experiences with a German journalist in writing a collaborative Arabic textbook. Within RSC specifically, some of the students and staff members had friendships that extended outside of the school. Nonetheless, I was aware that students' perceptions of me, and their willingness to partake in interviews, were shaped by their perceptions of other westerners they had met prior to my arrival.

In this section I will more closely examine what my positionality meant to my research – the limitations and opportunities it presented – while I was in Jordan. More specifically, I will discuss power relations in the field, the processes of establishing relationships, and how reflexivity functions in the context of my research.

### ***Researcher' and 'researched': Responding to power relations in the field***

Razack (2007) argues that Canadian humanitarian responses have “engaged in a peculiar process of consumption ... which amounts to what [she calls] ‘stealing the pain of others’” (p. 375-6). Her point that Black people’s suffering only gains meaning when the White body uses it as a means of transformation at the expense of the former’s subjectivity is important in the context of research with refugees. Even as researchers are aware of limiting refugee narratives that focus on passivity and trauma, we nonetheless reproduce and reinforce power relations through our very presence *as* researchers ‘in the field’.

How, then, can research with marginalized groups avoid dehumanizing practices? How can research be used as a tool of emancipation instead? Researching a higher education project that implicitly recognizes refugees’ capabilities certainly makes this easier. Such projects, through their very existence, challenge the assumption that “refugees lack the capabilities to cope with the challenges of higher education” (Zeus, 2011, p. 259). However, beyond this, my research process was designed with a focus on agency, insofar as I focused on interview topics that highlighted students’ pursuits of and experiences with education. I did not ask questions relating to potential instances of trauma, instead taking cues from students, and only engaging with them if they chose to bring up such topics. As well, “participant-observers must accept that their written products do not have immediate relevancy to [the researched communities] ... ‘Participation,’ therefore, takes the form of providing pro-bono assistance to communities” (Watson, 2010, p. 133). The process and outcomes of this research, then, may have little immediate benefit to the students with whom I met and spoke. With this in mind, I attempted to serve community interests through both my work at RSC and through individual level support in helping students achieving various education and language related goals. Finally, I aimed to be

transparent in my research process, engaging in conversation with students about research analysis and providing the option of giving transcripts of interviews (an option two students chose). Nonetheless, I acknowledge that even with these efforts, my act of ‘representing’ refugee students in this thesis as a researcher lays bare the power relations of this research project.

### *Establishing relationships*

For the first month of my time in Jordan, I focused on developing informal relationships with students and establishing myself as a familiar presence at the school. Instead of working at the RSC administrative office, I would often take my work to the school, and station myself either inside one of the classrooms when they were unoccupied by classes, or at one of the tables frequented by students on the breaks. Through this process, I slowly got to know many of the students at the school. I also taught informal English classes at the school, allowing me to get to know some of the students who were not in the higher education program. As these classes were not part of the higher education program, I did not feel that my role as a teacher in these situations posed a conflict in my research. My established presence at the school via opportunities like these, however, made it easier for students to get to know me and understand my role at the school.

I was always clear about my role as both an intern and a researcher when asked, as I was aware of the ethical implications this dual identity could hold for my research. However, I also made sure to tell curious students about myself beyond these roles. After this first month, I spoke to one of the higher education classes about my research, and asked for student volunteers for interviews. I explained the purpose of my research, my affiliation with York University, and the processes undertaken to ensure ethical practices and confidentiality. I left a paper on which students could write their contact information and left the room to ensure no one would feel

pressured to sign up. Later, I collected the list from an office administrator. This process was deliberate so as to be as upfront as possible about my research, but also to physically remove myself from this initial process of ‘recruitment’ to ensure participation was completely voluntary. From these initial interviews, other students at the school became aware of my research, and would approach me about being interviewed. Some students I interviewed put me in touch with friends of theirs. This was particularly useful in accessing students who, for various reasons, weren’t actively enrolled in classes at the school. In some instances, I specifically asked students with whom I had developed friendships for interviews.

### ***Reflexivity in research***

I understand reflexivity as a process wherein “researchers engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis” as a means of “unmask[ing] complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing” (Finlay, 2002, p. 209). Reflexive practice highlights the ways in which the “(co)-construction of knowledge” between researcher and researched occur (Finlay, 2002, p. 211). My positionality as a non-Arabic speaking Canadian researcher clearly placed me as an ‘outsider’ amongst the refugee student community in Jordan. However, the reliance on the dichotomy between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ researcher status “ignores the complex nature of development research” (Apnetiik & Parpart, 2006, p. 34). Therefore, I will now untangle the complexities of my own identity in the field and its relationship to the production of this research.

As I discussed above, my role as an intern with RSC required careful consideration while conducting research. This internship was crucial to my ability to build relationships with students. It also gave me unhindered access to visit classes, go to community events, and more generally to become integrated into the school environment over the three months I was there. However, this role also necessarily informed the kinds of conversations I had with students. My



research involves questions of representation; and implicit in such an exploration is the question of who the representation is directed towards (i.e. to me as both a researcher and as a humanitarian actor). Nonetheless, I do not view this as a weakness of my work, but rather a way in which the politics of representation play out in conversations between refugee students and humanitarian actors (which was certainly a large part of my identity in the field).

My positionality as an ‘outsider’ opened up avenues for discussion that I felt wouldn’t have happened otherwise. Conversations around religion reflect this process. In interviews, students unanimously told me that religion is an extremely difficult topic of conversation in the Middle East. They would often contrast this to how westerners discuss religion, particularly that it is a less “sensitive” topic for us. This perception of westerners, made it easier for students to discuss the intricacies of balancing a multi-faith school environment at RSC in ways that wouldn’t have happened in conversations with an ‘insider’<sup>9</sup>. I believe my positionality as a western outsider turned me into a neutral person of sorts, to whom students of all faiths could talk to, with relative frankness, including about religion.

Even as I was most often seen as a Canadian, my identity as an Iranian occasionally became more salient. This was especially relevant when I met older Iraqi students at the school, for whom the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war was not a distant memory, but a painful and relatively recently lived experience. In these circumstances, it was not just my identity as an Iranian that was relevant, but also more specifically my identity as a southwestern Iranian. My hometown is on land that was contested during the Iran-Iraq war, a fact that was discussed frankly in these moments. Nonetheless, as I did not interview any older students I feel the impact of these

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Hyndman (2001) interrogates the very dichotomy between insider and outsider statuses in fieldwork research and the presumed power differentials bound in this distinction.

encounters on the research was minimal. However, it is worth noting that I feel that my positionality as an Iranian-Canadian foreclosed any opportunities I would have had to pursue these interviews. In addition, Sudanese students brought up the intricacies of Iran and Sudan's diplomatic ties. These conversations were less fraught, however, and Sudanese students were willing to explain what they knew of this to me.

Momsen (2006) argues that women can be recreated in the field as “non-gendered” (p. 45). Thus, I expected that being a woman researcher might allow students to feel more comfortable disclosing information to me. I had access to situations – such as meeting with two male students outside of the school – that would not have been acceptable had I been from the region. Particularly in interviews with women students, our gender- and age-based commonalities opened up opportunities to discuss gender-based experiences in higher education. More generally, the closeness of my age to that of some of the students, occasionally helped to reduce hierarchies. This process was helped by the fact that I also am a student, creating more shared commonalities.

### **Conducting research**

My research design and process have been broadly informed by the traditions of qualitative social science research. I take an interpretivist and constructivist approach in my research, as I believe any process of knowledge production is always partial and situated. I focus on how the experiences of the students I interviewed are socially produced and “in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2004, p. 16). My research process has been iterative – there has been a constant interplay between the collection and analysis of data, from the first day in the field.

The research has been led primarily by qualitative interviews with students. I also interviewed NGO representatives from both within RSC and from other refugee education NGOs



in Jordan. I was given access to internal reports and statistics about students at RSC. As an intern with RSC, I was a constant presence at the school, and therefore, I feel that I am more bodily situated in this ethnographic research. Ethnography is “an intersubjective form of qualitative research through which the relationships of researcher and researched, insider and outsider, self and other, body and environment, and field and home are negotiated” (Watson, 2010, p. 121). Particularly in the parts of my research that focused on questions of recognition and representation, my role in my fieldwork is inherently part of these negotiations that the students undertook. As the focus of this research is the students, interviews with NGO representatives, ethnographic work, and internal reports are used to primarily to contextualize student voices.

The RSC school is the primary site of my research. While I interviewed some students and NGO representatives at the administrative office (and some non-RSC NGO representatives at their offices), I am primarily interested in students’ experiences within the school. While of course students discussed with me their experiences outside of the school (both in their countries of origin and in Jordan), the necessarily circumscribed scope of this thesis has meant that attention paid to their experiences outside of the school is limited.

### ***Interviews with students***

Interviews with students are the backbone of this research and of my method, as they provide “both retrospective and real-time accounts” of participant experiences (Gioia, 2013, p. 19). Furthermore, the fluid nature of my interviews highlights the potential for research to be collaborative, rather than interrogative (McDowell, 2010). By this, I mean I focused on interview ‘topics’ rather than questions to allow for flexibility in the interview process. This allowed students to discuss areas that they were more interested in, and allowed me to take cues from students in understanding what they were most engaged in discussing.

I conducted interviews with 13 refugee students or recent graduates. Of this sample, 10 students were men, and 3 were women. As I have mentioned above, my original aim was to interview roughly equal numbers of men and women; however, given the composition of the classes I was interested in (the final two years and graduates), this ratio was the best I could manage. I was more successful in finding a relatively equal composition of different nationalities of students: I interviewed 2 Syrian students, 4 Iraqi students, 4 Sudanese students, and 3 Somali students. All of the students were in the age range of 18 to 28 (see table 1.1). Pseudonyms have been used for student names.

Given that I was interested in questions of representation and agency, I limited interviews to students who had been enrolled in the program for at least one full academic year. This shrank the potential pool of interview candidates, as many students either resettle or withdraw from the program for various reasons as the years go on. It also changed the composition of the potential interview demographic, and contributed to my inability to maintain gender parity in my interview sample. The first year class, for example, was fairly equally comprised of women and men, but the second and third year classes had disproportionately fewer women than men, reflecting additional barriers women face in continuing their education.

**Table 1.1: Student interviews**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Date(s) conducted</b>
Abdul	Male	Sudan	26	July 18, 2016
Ahmad	Male	Sudan	28	July 21, 2016
Ali	Male	Somalia	27	August 15, 2016
Amina	Female	Somalia	26	August 28, 2016
Amir	Male	Syria	19	July 13, 2016
Fadi	Male	Iraq	20	July 12, 2016
Hakim	Male	Sudan	25	July 21, 2106
Hazim	Male	Sudan	27	July 24, 2016
Maryam	Female	Iraq	24	July 12, 2016, August 21, 2016
Mohammed	Male	Iraq	18	July 13, 2016, August 24, 2016
Reza	Male	Syria	25	August 4, 2016
Taifa	Female	Somalia	21	July 26, 2016
Ziyad	Male	Iraq	27	July 12, 2016

Interviews were held either at the school or the administrative office. When I first started conducting interviews, I scheduled them at the office after work hours to ensure privacy.

However, it became clear to me that I was often more concerned about the students' privacy than were the students themselves. Thus, interviews were often held in a quiet corner at the school itself, which was the location students chose and where they seemed to feel most comfortable. Interviews were recorded, and were anywhere from forty minutes to two hours. In most instances, I met with students once for interviews, but occasionally I met students twice.

Students had a variety of motivations for agreeing to interviews. Some were curious about the topic of research, and wanted to learn more about my research process and analysis over the course of the summer. Others saw it as an opportunity to practice English. Some told me that they had never been interviewed before, and wanted to push themselves to try something new. In the case of a few students – those who I had specifically asked for interviews – I felt they were doing the interview as a favour to me, and I was particularly mindful of ensuring full and genuine voluntary participation.

### ***Focus groups with students***

As part of my responsibilities as an intern with RSC, I conducted several focus groups to qualitatively understand students' perceptions of higher education for a report I wrote. For one of these focus groups, I received permission from both RSC and the students in the focus group to also use the data for my own research. Bosco & Herman (2010) argue that focus groups allow for the exploration of dynamics within a group and the "construction of collective meanings" (p. 193). As well, a common rationale for focus group research is that it allows an emphasis on "participation and fluid interactions", which can allow for collective experiences and memories to be negotiated and redefined (Bosco & Herman, 2010, p. 198).

Despite this, I did not find the focus groups provided me with the kind of insights I was able to gain from one to one interviews. There are several potential explanations for this disjuncture between the richness and depth of insights in the individual interviews versus the focus group interviews. First, I was not interviewing my intended group of later-year students in the focus group; thus they simply may have not yet had the experiences gained by the longer term students. Second, I was simultaneously acting as a humanitarian worker and an independent researcher in the focus group. Thus students may have self-censored their critiques of RSC and their associated experiences. Finally, "it is essential to question power relations in a community as they are usually more complex than appears at first sight" (Momsen, 2006, p. 49). Conducting a focus group, therefore, requires a nuanced knowledge on power relations *within* a community, and the ways in which these power relations can shape knowledge production in these circumstances. Re-listening to the interviews later, I was much more aware than I was at the time of two students 'leading' the responses far more than the other three students in the focus group. Therefore, it is likely that students were influenced by what one another said in the situation. As

well, the unwillingness to say anything negative about their experiences could reflect both on my explicit situatedness as a RSC worker, *and* on not wanting to be seen in a particular way by their peers.

I raise these shortcomings of the focus group research method in my own research to foreground the value of the individual interviews with students as sites for rich discussions filled with internal contradictions, divergences, and critiques. These contradictions are part of what made the interviews so compelling, and why they are central to speaking to the aims and objectives of this research.

### ***Interviews with NGO representatives***

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 9 NGO representatives, both from within RSC and from the larger humanitarian community in Jordan. These interviews were used primarily for a contextual understanding of higher education for refugee projects in Jordan generally. The interviews with representatives within RSC were also used as a way to better contextualize the students' perspectives. I interviewed 5 NGO representatives from education for refugee projects in Jordan. I spoke with these representatives because their NGOs conduct work within the context of Jordan (i.e. instead of supporting students migrating to other countries), and focused on post-secondary education. All of these interviews were held either at the RSC administrative office, or at the NGO representative's office. I also interviewed 2 NGO representatives and 2 instructors from within RSC, to more specifically understand the context of the student experience there. All of these interviews were held at the RSC administrative office or school.

**Table 1.2: NGO based interviews**

<b>Interview type</b>	<b>Interview descriptor</b>	<b>Date conducted</b>
Representatives from NGOs focusing on education for refugees	NGO representative 1	June 8, 2016
	NGO representative 2	June 9, 2016
	NGO representative 3	June 12, 2016
	NGO representative 4	June 15, 2016
	NGO representative 5	June 22, 2016
Representative from RSC	RSC representative 1	July 31, 2016
	RSC representative 2	August 23, 2016
Instructors from RSC	RSC instructor 1	August 24, 2016
	RSC instructor 2	August 24, 2016

### **Ethics, confidentiality, and risk**

Verbal or written consent was gained in all interviews. All interviews were recorded, and then later transcribed. In the process of gaining consent, I had conversations with students about my research topic and purpose. In efforts to ensure transparency in research practices, I was candid about the research and the ongoing process of analysis. As well, I endeavored to make the interview a collaborative process, by offering information about myself when students were curious, and being open to students in turn, ‘interviewing’ me about myself (particularly my identity as an Iranian-Canadian). These differences allowed for “avenues for interaction, learning and knowledge exchange” (Apnetiik & Parpart, 2006, p. 36). No monetary compensation was offered to participants.

On the topic of confidentiality, I took my cues from students. I provided students with the opportunities for complete confidentiality during the interview. However, students often preferred to have interviews in pairs, or in the close vicinity of other students. Initial interview questions were chosen so as to not address potential points of trauma unless students themselves brought them up. As such, there was minimal psychological risk to the participants.

Data coding and analysis were accomplished through a grounded theory approach as a means of foregrounding “what people do and the meanings they make of their actions”

(Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 154). Open coding was conducted initially, followed by focused coding. Gioia et al. (2013) argue that participants are “knowledgeable agents” – that is, they “know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions” (p. 17). The implications for this in the research process mean that the participants’ own voices and interpretations are foregrounded and privileged in the process of coding and analysis. Therefore, in the open coding stage, I stuck as closely as possible to the participants’ own words. When coding, I brought my own perspective as a researcher into the process by using a theoretical lens to understand the overarching narrative of the data segments. This simultaneous weaving of informant and researcher voices is the foundation of both rigorous qualitative research and “the defining hallmark of high-quality qualitative research” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 18).

### **Outline of thesis**

So far in this chapter, I have introduced the rationale for the study, the aims and objectives. As well, I have provided the relevant historical context of forced migration to Jordan, and the current humanitarian landscape surrounding education for refugees in Amman. I also reviewed my methodology and methods for this research, including a contextual focus on the RSC school. The question of representation implicitly implies: representation *by* whom and *for* whom? Therefore, I paid particular attention to my own role in the humanitarian community as a part of RSC. In chapter 2, I will examine relevant literature, reviewing three key areas: the humanitarian emergency, education in emergencies, and refugee higher education. I present my key findings regarding the relationship between higher education, representation, and agency in chapter 3. In chapter 4, I conclude the thesis with reference to broader implications of the research I have conducted. By re-centering discussions of higher education for refugees around

the most often marginalized figure – the refugee student – it is my hope that we can thus better align conversations around humanitarian practices and academic work to *flow* from this crucial starting point.



## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND THE LITERATURE

This research begins with the perspective that the students – whose voices are the bedrock of this thesis – are both limited by structural constraints, yet also able to exercise agency within these constraints. Humanitarian practice, as with development work more generally, has the potential to both contest and reinforce unequal power structures. This dual nature of humanitarianism is particularly relevant as organizations are increasingly driven as businesses. In the three months I was with RSC, the organization was increasingly preoccupied with funding and donor concerns, placing new potential constraints on the kinds of operations the organization could undertake. Brun (2016) argues that humanitarian action aims for temporary solutions that tend to “make people stuck in a humanitarian system for years” (p. 394).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the kind of organization that I research here, while creating avenues for long-term human development, does not challenge the systems that produce ‘refugees’ – rather, it takes these systems as a given. This critique is not specific to RSC, but rather to humanitarian practice with refugees generally.

More generally, genuine participation and collaboration with the intended beneficiaries of projects like these are never fully possible due to inherent structural constraints that define much of humanitarian intervention. Participation here is wrapped up in the people’s possession of “their own decision making powers, free of oppressive and dehumanizing circumstances” (Leal, 2007, p. 541). Participatory power is thus defined by the *taking* of it: genuine participation can, by definition, not be “handed down from the powerful to the powerless” (Leal, 2007, p. 545). Indeed, in the context of refugee education, “irrespective of rhetoric to the contrary, educational planning is often done ‘for’ refugees ... rather than ‘with’ refugees” (Zeus, 2011, p. 268).

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<sup>10</sup> See also the discussion of the feminization of asylum in Hyndman & Giles (2011).

However, to only look at structural constraints runs the risk of losing sight of how refugees exercise their agency and contest different aspects of these humanitarian systems. Particularly salient in the urban setting of Amman, refugees are continuously involved in processes of creating networks, seeking out different resources, and leveraging humanitarian practices in ways that help them achieve their own particular goals. Moreover, even within these limitations, refugees have the potential to engage with and challenge oppressive structures in their lives.

Implicit in this work is the employment of a rights-based approach: that is, beyond the assumption that education is an inalienable right, how does education support refugees in exercising *other* rights? This question weighs heavy given that most refugees are rendered almost completely rightless; they are the opposite of political subjects (Arendt, 1966). Can education, then, support refugee students' *own* rendering of themselves as political subjects – can they affirm their own right to have rights through education? Arendt (1966) introduces the notion of the “right to have rights”, whereby an individual needs to be a citizen of a nation-state to have access to the rights which are said to belong to him or her on the sole basis of being a human. Agamben (1998), too, points to the importance of recognition by the political state through the separation of “bare life” from “political life”. Picking up on this, Limbu (2009) says that even though “human rights have never been transparent, they have always been assumed to be so” (p. 258).

Freire (1970) points to education as the potential site of emancipatory practices, which can lead to the contestation of these oppressive structures. He argues that “a pedagogy of the oppressed must be created *with*, not *for*, the oppressed ... in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (Freire, 1970, p. 48). Again, I point to the structural constraints in humanitarian work

that prevent that creation of a pedagogy that is constructed at every level *with* the oppressed. Nonetheless, to write off every process that is not forged completely in the way that Freire advocates would be simplistic. Therefore, I am interested in the spaces for liberation that there may be among the people I met with and spoke to.

Freire's work on conscientization<sup>11</sup> has had important implications for the concept of 'empowerment' in feminist literature (Carr, 2003). While conscientization and empowerment have been conflated, Stromquist (2003) argues that the former is actually a precursor towards a feminist conceptualization of the latter. Carr (2003) highlights that while conscientization is a necessary precondition, the concept of 'empowerment' from a feminist standpoint is a more dynamic process than the one that Freire brings forth, as it emphasizes *process*. Weiller (1991), too, provides a feminist critique of Freire's pedagogy, arguing that a more situated approach is essential. That is, how do we bring to light "the possibility of a contradictory experience of oppression among the oppressed?" (Weiller, 1991, p. 453).

Even as feminist scholars have critiqued and furthered Freire's pedagogy, they have also raised important questions since the 1990s around 'empowerment' itself (Gore, 1992; Kabeer, 1999). Batliwala (1994) and Parpart et al. (2003), for example, point to how the term has been co-opted by mainstream development efforts, rerouting its purpose away from social transformation and instead towards improvements in productivity and efficiency. Both alternative and mainstream development, however, have traditionally viewed empowerment as linked to the ability to exercise "power over" people, resources, and institutions (Parpart et al., 2003). To this end, Kabeer (1999) and Rowland (1997) refocus attention on the power held

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<sup>11</sup> Conscientization (or a critical consciousness) refers to "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 35).

“within” (i.e. people’s sense of agency). Mosedale (2005) argues that despite some attempts to understand empowerment more holistically, the process of ‘empowerment’ continues to be focused on the level of the individual. Parpart et al. (2003) emphasize the need to understand the relations the local has with national and global forces to draw out how a focus only on the individual is insufficient.

Parpart et al. (2003) remind us that even those who are assumed to be ‘powerless’ (and thus in need of empowerment) still can and do exercise power in different ways (a point that I return to in my analysis in chapter 3). Others, like Aslanbeigui et al. (2010), do away entirely with the concept of empowerment, arguing it is not viable as a point of analysis in understanding changing power relations. Even scholars who do still use empowerment as an analytical tool, such as Jakimow & Kilby (2006), point to its inherent limitations, where individuals are ‘empowered’ only within their existing systems without a challenge to existing structures that limit ‘power’ in the first place.

While recognizing these important critiques, I nonetheless believe a cautious employment of this concept can, in conjunction with other analytical tools, be used as a means to understand the relational and shifting nature of power. Kabeer (1999) defines power as “the ability to make choices” (p. 436). Empowerment, thus entails “a process of change” that implies “gaining the ability to exercise power” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). I find Kabeer’s analysis to be particularly well suited for my research as she is interested in the ways in which people can exercise “those strategic life choices which are critical for people to live the lives they want” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). As well, she is aligned with other feminist scholars, like Cornwall (2016), who emphasize empowerment as both process and outcome. With this I keep Parpart et al.’s (2003) call to locate the local in the national and global in mind, highlighting in my analysis the ways students must

negotiate power relations within the school, but also in relation to Jordanian government policies and the western influence tied to RSC.

This thesis argues that higher education can open up new avenues for alternative narratives for refugee students through several key facets that will be explored in chapter 3. My research here, as discussed above, is structured by the interplay between humanitarian intervention and human agency, and the space students have within this framework to utilize education for their own personal goals and to achieve empowerment. Flowing from this starting point, then, this chapter examines several key areas of literature relating to this argument. I will examine literature relating to i) humanitarian emergencies, ii) emergency education, and iii) refugee higher education.

The first section on humanitarian emergencies traces the emergence of this field of practice and study. This is critical in understanding how the practices of humanitarianism today shape the kinds of representation and agency individuals in exile possess. And, as the provision of refugee higher education itself is a humanitarian practice, this section will help to explain the underpinnings of this field.

### **Humanitarian emergencies**

In this section, I will examine the ways in which the politics of humanitarianism have been closely related to the historical maintenance of global inequalities. While the advent of humanitarianism has traditionally been associated with the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Barnett & Weiss (2011) argue that the antecedents of humanitarianism lie much earlier in the late eighteenth century with the rise of the abolitionist movement. Nonetheless, the formation of the ICRC in 1859 was significant in its concurrent

establishment of the humanitarian values of impartiality and neutrality (Barnett & Weiss, 2011).

These values became entrenched in humanitarianism as these interventions increased and grew in scope.

‘Modern humanitarianism’, then, began in the post-Cold War era, when humanitarianism shifted significantly in scale, scope, and significance to respond to the advent of so-called ‘complex emergencies’<sup>12</sup> (Barnett, 2005; Minear, 2002). This shift has been attributed to a number of different factors. In the 1990s, there appeared to be more humanitarian crises than ever before; these crises were increasingly referred to as ‘complex’<sup>13</sup>; states began using humanitarianism as a way to protect their own geopolitical interests; and state sovereignty was no longer seen as sacrosanct (Barnett, 2005; Belloni, 2007; Minear, 2002). Emergencies in the wake of the Cold War were increasingly seen to be characterized by armed conflict, the displacement of a large number of people, the collapse of an economy, and/or a disruption or decline in basic services (Kagawa, 2005). In response to what was defined as the increasingly complicated nature of an ‘emergency’, humanitarian efforts in the 1990s shifted to include education as the fourth pillar of humanitarian response, along with food and water, shelter, and health care (Sinclair, 2001). This shift to education was part of a larger trend in humanitarianism to begin serving longer term development efforts, beyond just immediate relief (Barnett, 2005).

Uvin’s (2007) tracing of the rise of the rights-based approach in the 1990s coincides to the same time as when education in emergencies as a field was growing. Uvin (2007) attributes

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<sup>12</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) defines complex emergencies broadly as “situations of disrupted livelihoods and threats to life produced by warfare, civil disturbance and large-scale movements of people, in which any emergency response has to be conducted in a difficult political and security environment” (Wisner & Adams, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Barnett (2011) points out that emergencies produced by conflict have always been ‘complex’; what changed in the post-World War II era, rather, was the attention the international community paid to these emergencies.

this rise as an attempt to respond to the failure of structural adjustment programs. The rights-based approach takes as its core the equal and inalienable rights of all humans. In the context of education in emergencies, then, education is viewed as an inalienable human right (ensconced in the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [UN, 1976]), and its provision in emergency contexts can be justified solely on these grounds. The rights-based approach was seen as a way to move towards inclusion and democratic processes in development. However this shift "is shorn of any reference to the global inequality ... there is no conception of human rights duties beyond that of one's 'own-state'" (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004, p. 11), interrogating the efficacy of a rights-based approach.

These shifts in humanitarian practice have had important implications for the context of education in emergency projects. Barnett (2005) argues that humanitarianism post-Cold War has become increasingly politicized. Following the lead of the ICRC's mandate, humanitarian activities before the Cold War had functioned in a relief framework (Barnett & Weiss, 2011). A relief approach focuses on saving the lives of individuals, but does not addressing the underlying causes that led to the 'crisis'. Principles of neutrality and independence theoretically kept humanitarianism free of politics in practice. However, in the 1990s, humanitarian activities became increasingly politicized, with a claim to "restructure underlying social relations" (Barnett, 2005, p. 724). In this view, "it was possible and desirable to transform political, economic, and cultural structures so that they liberated individuals and produced peace and progress", addressing "the root causes that leave populations at risk" (Barnett, 2005, p. 728). This shift has allowed for the provision of education in emergencies, which moves away from relief frameworks towards a more politically minded mandate (discussed further below in this chapter). Belloni (2007), however, points to the ways in which humanitarianism both originates

from and reproduces an unequal power relationship between the global North and South. Specifically, it maintains geopolitical interests by “prevent[ing] the transmission of disorder and chaos from war-torn, poor and peripheral countries to the developed world” (Belloni, 2007, p. 464).

While humanitarianism can be understood to have become more ‘politically minded’, scholars also argue that humanitarianism has become couched in a kind of antipolitics (Fisher, 1997; Ticktin, 2011). In her examination of undocumented people in France, Ticktin (2011) argues that the language of care and humanitarianism creates an “antipolitics” in which structures of power and control are erased in the name of a depoliticized and ahistorical ‘relief’ model. Harrell-Bond (2002) also discusses the presumed ‘apolitical’ nature of humanitarianism, but in the context of a ‘charitable’ ethos. She points out that the dominant founding ethos of humanitarian work is that of charity, embodied by the notion of *giving* to those in need.

This purportedly apolitical nature of humanitarianism, then, creates and reproduces particular power relations between humanitarian actors and refugees. Malkki’s (1996) work on the dehistoricizing impacts of humanitarian work has ushered in much of the recent critical scholarship. She argues that in universalizing particular displaced people into ‘refugees’ – in abstracting them from their political, historical, cultural conditions – humanitarian practices tend to silence refugees. She points out that in the post World War II era, humanitarianism developed a standardized way of talking about and handling ‘refugee problems’, which have had the effect of “silencing refugees” (Malkki, 1996, p. 386). This ‘silencing’ of refugees has been reinterpreted by scholars in a number of ways: in Ticktin’s (2011) analysis, for example, she argues that the medicalization of care in France means that undocumented bodies may be recognized and looked after by the state, but only as long as they remain sick. Harrell-Bond’s



(2002) examination of humanitarianism picks up on Malkki's analysis of refugee representations that focus on helplessness and powerlessness. Harrell-Bond (2002) argues that these representations have material consequences for the kinds of aid that are provided and the ways in which humanitarian work is justified. Humanitarian actors have the power to decide who deserves to receive aid, particularly in refugee camps. Refugees are expected to be 'grateful'; and as part of their survival strategy they must perform 'gratefulness' in order to receive the aid that they require.

These power relations must also be understood in larger contexts. Hyndman (2000) points out that while the UNHCR has an official apolitical mandate, its donor funding shapes particular interests in the ways in which it manages displacement. In protecting the geopolitical interests in countries in the global North, humanitarianism promotes "strategies of immobility" that keep people in place. Closely tied to this is the notion of 'preventative protection', where the emphasis is on the right to remain in your home country (instead of the right to leave). Hyndman (2000) argues that these strategies maintain the impermeability of borders to refugees and protect states from their legal obligations. This politics of mobility – where some groups have more power of mobility than others – is intimately linked to humanitarianism. Furthering the work done on portrayals of refugees specifically in long term exile, Hyndman & Giles (2017) argue that these individuals "cease to be constituted as liberal democratic subjects, even though they are scripted as such through international law and by the United Nations (UN) agencies mandated to support them" (p. 1). In the case of long term exile, Hyndman & Giles argue that "when humanitarian subjects cease to be at risk (or a risk), their subjectivity slips to a more abject status" (p. 15). By drawing on the work of Arendt and de Beauvoir, Brun (2016) argues that the predominant focus on saving the biological life over the biographical life in

humanitarianism “defuturizes” the lives of refugees, presenting us “with a heightened sense of discontinuity, rendering the future more contingent” (p. 402).<sup>14</sup>

### **Emerging scholarship on new forms of representations**

With scholarship well established on the discursive representations of refugees, and the material impacts of these representations, researchers have turned their attention to ways in which refugees can be re-represented – or, more pertinently, the ways in which refugees *do* re-represent themselves. Harrell-Bond (2002) and Limbu (2009), among others, have called for the critical need to find new representations of refugees. Much of this work has been propelled forward through the recent work of Butler (2004), who asks: “Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?” (p. 20). While Butler (2004) interrogates the limits of recognition of the other in the context of the Iraq War, Hyndman & Giles (2017) more broadly ask this question of individuals in extended exile. The ways in which the grievable life is framed turns those outside of the frame to be unrecognizable as human. However, the problem is not just to find a new frame, but to understand how norms will always “allocate recognition differentially” (Butler, 2009, p. 6). Fraser (2005), too, is preoccupied with questions of justice, and argues that *misframing* is what results in deeper forms of misrepresentation. Globalization, however, makes the misframing form of representative more visible, as transnational ties of solidarity are able to form.

One way Limbu (2009) contends this reframing can happen is through the redrawing of cosmopolitanism, where the figure of the refugee moves from the margins to the centre in a new definition, positioning “the refugee as the exemplary cosmopolitan subject” (p. 265). This cosmopolitanism draws on the notion of the human as a citizen of the world, with a sense of

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<sup>14</sup> See also the discussion of ontological security in Hyndman & Giles (2017).

belonging going beyond one's immediate community. In these ways, Limbu's (2009) re-representation of the refugee can be seen as more radical than Harrell-Bond's (2002) work, who in the process of breaking away from viewing refugees as victims, continues to rely on the primacy of the nation-state in upholding human rights and ensuring accountability. Fraser's (2005) reframing centers on moving away from the Westphalian model of justice towards the idea of the "all-affected principle", which highlights the moral standing of individuals affected by a given social structure or institution as subjects of justice.

Hyndman & Giles (2017) also highlight the need to decenter traditional institutions, particularly the perspectives of global North countries on questions of displacement. Indeed, circling back to Butler's questions of framing, they ask: "Are existing frames of inquiry and scholarship perpetuating the problem of extended exile?" (p. 6) These existing frames include language focusing on policy and technical solutions. Similarly, Brun (2016), points to how the language she was initially inclined to use in describing the situation of refugees – "being stuck" – is not analogous with the lived experiences of people in protracted displacement, as there is always some kind of movement in people's lives. These interrogations of the traditional ways in which we speak of 'refugee experiences' are critical in finding new ways forward in scholarship and practice.

### **Education in emergencies**

The higher education for refugees literature has developed as a subset of the larger education in emergencies literature. There are a number of contradictions that arise between relief and development. In examining the field of education in emergencies, I focus on how the subset of higher education for refugees speaks to some of the preoccupations and critiques of the

education in emergencies literature. Finally, I examine some of the gaps and future steps in the field of higher education for refugees.

The field of education in emergencies has been developing since the 1990s (Burde et al., 2016; Novelli & Cardozo, 2008). Paulson & Rappleye (2007) argue that the field is still emerging as there is not a common theoretical, conceptual, or analytical ground to hold the various studies and disciplines engaged with this topic. Most literature has been in the form of grey literature, such as policy documents, leading to a concerted effort by scholars to fill this gap with academic scholarship since the mid-2000s (see Burde et al. [2016] and Kagawa [2005], for example). Education in development more generally has been justified by the recognition of education as a human right.

Practitioners have increasingly recognized the impact of armed conflict on education, and the barriers this creates to formal schooling (Kagawa, 2005). The 2000 UNESCO Dakar Framework for Action, however, signified a shift that went beyond traditional schooling in crisis situations, and a promotion of a particular kind of education that emphasized human rights, peace, democracy, and the environment (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). The creation of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies in 2000 is attributed to and signals the recent focus on education in emergencies (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). The role of education in emergencies has been particularly pronounced in the post-2001 era, which has more generally been characterized by a merging of security interests with development priorities (Novelli, 2010; Novelli & Cardozo, 2008).

Education in emergencies is based on the belief that access to education is an inalienable right for all children (Kagawa, 2005). This belief emerged after World War II, but gained widespread acceptance with the rise of a global human rights movement in the 1990s (Bromley

& Andina, 2010). Forums and framework like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; the refugee's right to education as outline in the 1951 Convention; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and Dakar Framework from the 1990 Education for All (EFA) conference all emphasize this movement's rise. However, despite this rights-based movement, rationalities for education in emergencies are also rooted in its externalities. This means that education is viewed as valuable for reaching particular goals instead of being provided simply because it is a human right. For example, Betancourt & Khan (2008) examine the role of education in improving resilience in children affected by armed conflict. Kagawa (2005) is critical of the narrow focus on economic development in the field of education in emergencies, and argues that there needs to be more of a holistic focus on human development. Bromley & Andina (2010), too, agree that despite a rights-based rhetoric, much of the post-World War II period has been characterized by instrumental justifications, such as the protective value of education. However, in contrast to Kagawa (2005), they argue that following the 1990s EFA Conference, the discourse has shifted to more of a genuine rights-based approach.

Kagawa (2005) points out that even in the delimitation of the terms 'emergency' and 'education', definitions and scopes are broadly and ambiguously set out. I agree with Kagawa that "dominant emergency education is interchangeable with educational responses to armed conflicts", which highlights particular biases in practice (Kagawa, 2005, p. 493). Novelli & Cardoso (2008) argue that these gaps are driven by the focus on 'problem-solving' – or policy driven – research that does not critically engage with the roots of problems and place them in larger frameworks of understanding.

As with development practices generally, education in emergencies also remains a western-centric enterprise. Novelli & Cardoso (2008) argue that in education initiatives in emergencies, the western nation-state is seen as the model for fragile states. Education in emergency projects are also ahistorical, and do not take specific contexts into consideration (Novelli & Cardozo, 2008). There is an increasing move away from seeing education in emergencies as inherently productive for social and economic development. Bush & Saltarelli (2000), for example, critically examine the ways in which education can be used as a weapon of repression, preservation of privilege, and entrenchment of unequal power relations.

Education broadly includes all levels, although primary education is most often the focus. The level and types of education have important implications for structural, pedagogical, and practical considerations. As well, the breadth of emergency education initiatives can include anything from physical construction of schools to curricular considerations to ideological reconstruction. It is even unclear whether or not the field includes post-emergency education – or, indeed, what even constitutes as ‘post’ emergency (Kagawa, 2005). Moreover, “the grouping of all populations with different and specific needs together is problematic as different approaches, contents and emphases are needed” (Kagawa, 2005). The breadth of the education in emergencies field, thus, creates significant divergences in approaches.

## **Refugee higher education**

### **Definitions and debates**

The development of a specific ‘higher education for refugees’ field as a subset of the larger ‘education in emergencies’ field began in the 2000s, with the emergence of projects like the Australian Catholic University’s diploma program in 2004 or the Institute of Higher

Education's post-secondary courses in 2008 (Purkey, 2010). In contrast to the overwhelming broadness of the education in emergencies literature, this field is much narrower in scope and focus. Higher education for refugees takes place primarily in the context conflict-driven emergencies and prolonged forced displacement.

Nonetheless, there is room for much research diversity in the field of higher education for refugees. While this thesis literature review focuses on research done on higher education in the global South, much work has also been done on higher education and refugees post-resettlement (e.g. Harris & Marlowe [2011] examine the educational experiences of resettled students in Australia, and Shakya et al. [2012] explore reasons for educational aspirations among resettled youth in Canada). Conceptually, it is also unclear what scholars mean when they refer to 'higher education', as projects researched include vocational training, adult language programs, college diplomas, and university degrees (e.g. Crea [2016] researches students of both a diploma program and of adult language classes; Kengkunchorn & Hipsher [2010] examine vocational training, non-formal education, and formal higher education programs in Thailand). Education programs also include online, distance, and blended learning models, leading to different pedagogical challenges and benefits. Programs are also created by both educational institutions as well as by NGOs, leading to key structural differences in accreditation processes.

To date, little global coordination amongst these different programs has occurred, but they are rapidly expanding (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). Scholars are calling for the need for ongoing documentation on the processes and outcomes of these programs (Donald, 2014; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; Williams, 2012). The newness of this field has concentrated research on rationales for higher education for refugees, barriers to access, and project implementation. Work done on student experiences with higher education is extremely limited.

Projects – and subsequent research on such projects – have clustered in refugee camps in Kenya and Thailand (for projects in Kenya, see the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees [BHER] and the Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins [JC:HEM] projects [Crea, 2016; Dippo, Orgocka, & Giles, 2013]; for projects in Thailand, see the Australian Catholic University and post-10 projects [Kengkunchorn & Hipsher, 2010; Williams, 2012]). Research in other locations, and in urban areas, will diversify the understandings of this field, particularly the complex needs and experiences of students.

As mentioned earlier, the emergency in education literature underscores the relative scarcity of resources given to education as part of a humanitarian response. Higher education, then, is even less prioritized (Dryden-Peterson 2010; Dryden-Peterson, 2011). The lack of attention given to higher education in emergencies can more generally be understood through the impact that World Bank policies in the 1980s had on higher education institutions in the global South. This rationale emphasized a rate of return approach that argued for the comparatively low return to investment on higher education in the global South, compared to primary and secondary education (Psacharopoulos, 1986). The policies also claimed that higher education only had individual benefits, not societal ones, leading to a lack of attention towards higher education as part of a development effort (Psacharopoulos, 1986).

However, scholars argue that higher education is necessary as a response to the increasingly long-term nature of displacement (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010) by contributing to all three ‘durable solutions’ to protracted displacement: i) voluntary repatriation, ii) local integration into the country of asylum, and iii) migration to a third country (Wright & Plasterer, 2010). As well, Anselme & Zeus (2012) argue that the continued and essential value of a well-coordinated education effort lies in preventing youth ‘re-displacement’ following voluntary



repatriation. In response to the World Bank's longstanding argument that higher education only benefits individuals, Purkey (2010) and Wright & Plasterer (2010) discuss how individual higher education attainment can also lead to broader community impacts. Similar to the broader rationale for education in emergencies, higher education for refugees is also justified as a means of ensuring security and protection (Dryden-Peterson, 2010).

Critics of higher education in developing contexts argue that such initiatives are a poor use of resources, given that educated refugees may leave the first country of asylum, leading to so-called 'brain drain' (see, for example, Lowell & Findlay [2001]). However, Peterson (2010) contends that the very concept of 'brain drain' is rooted in a Westphalian logic that sees benefits only accruing within a nation-state framework. Instead, Peterson (2010) renames the phenomenon 'brain circulation', drawing attention to the transnational benefits of higher education.

Indeed, trying to justify higher education for refugees on the basis of economic development can be difficult, given the newness of these programs and the long-term nature of displacement. In the Ugandan context, Clark-Kazak (2010) points out that even if Congolese refugees are educated, they may not be able to get the kind of professional jobs they are looking for, given the scarcity of such positions and the prioritization of hiring Ugandans. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that higher education may not necessarily prepare graduates for the kinds of labour-based jobs that are available (Wright & Plasterer, 2010). For example, Wright & Plasterer (2010) discuss how encampment policies in Kenya limit the potential economic benefits of refugee education on a national level. Thus, Anselme & Hands (2010) argue that refugee post-secondary education should be vocational in nature, given that students can more clearly see the direct benefit of such training.

A focus on economic rationales is linked to the need to justify donor funding towards projects (Kengkunchorn & Hipsher, 2010). However, literature drawing on non-economic perspectives on higher education for refugees may prove to be more fruitful for future research. Zeus (2011) speaks to the ability of higher education to contribute to human development (2011). She argues that the very provision of higher education for refugees shapes “a new narrative of refugees as agents of their own and their communities’ development” (p. 272). Higher education can change “the inequalities in people’s abilities to make choices” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 436 as cited in Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010, p. 5). Crea (2016) argues that one key value of higher education lies in its ability to develop a future-minded orientation in refugee students and to create a sense of belonging within a community. Furthermore, it has been well documented that higher education is a driving aspiration among individuals in protracted exile (Clark-Kazak, 2010; Donald, 2014; El Jack, 2010).

### **Challenges in higher education for refugees**

Anselme & Hands (2010), Kengkunchorn & Hipsher (2010), and Wright & Plasterer (2010), among others, focus on the practical issues and limitations preventing students from accessing higher education. Kengkunchorn & Hipsher (2010) and Wright & Plasterer (2010) highlight congestion, lack of resources, and lack of trained teachers as main barriers, all of which are caused by a shortage in funding. Internet access is also defined as an increasingly large barrier as distance learning gains popularity (Kengkunchorn & Hipsher, 2010; Wright & Plasterer, 2010). Lack of accreditation is seen as a problem both for students trying to enter a higher education program while in exile and for former students who have resettled in third countries (Anselme & Hands, 2010; Kengkunchorn & Hipsher, 2010). Purkey (2010) contends that civil society has a key role to play in finding flexible and creative solutions to these barriers,

but acknowledges that donor funding is a key limitation in program development. Rasheed & Munoz (2016), however, point to the limitations in civil society thus far in dealing with the challenges of higher education implementation. These limitations are defined as stemming from a lack of coordination among different bodies, a lack of planning with refugees and host communities, and a narrow focus on only higher education without a systemic communal lens (Rasheed & Munoz, 2016). It is widely acknowledged that strong primary and secondary education systems are also essential for promoting higher education (Anselme & Hands, 2010; Crea, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2010).

### **What are impacts of higher education for refugees?**

When Purkey (2010) points out the difficulty in evaluating the ‘success’ of these programs due to their newness, she highlights a central shortcoming in the higher education for refugees literature. Nonetheless, some work is pointing to the ways in which higher education has, or could, create meaningful impacts in the students’ lives. Farah’s (2010) research pertains to the role of higher education in nation-building. She argues that at the same time that higher education is used in the building of a Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) identity, graduates were also able to use the skills gained from education to improve their socio-economic statuses without undermining the nation project. In the case of refugee camps in Kenya, Wright & Plasterer (2010) argue that despite Kenya’s encampment policies that limit potential economic and social benefits of education, higher education still provides refugees with the skills and knowledge needed to bolster the effectiveness of durable solutions into the future. However, they also highlight the frustration students feel in being unable to utilize what they have learned in the camps. Williams (2012) comes to similar conclusions in the context of the Thai-Burma camps.

Similarly, students in Crea's (2016) comparative study of Amman, Kakuma camp, and Dzaleka camp express gratitude for the experience of higher education, but uncertainty about the future.

In her study of South Sudanese women, El Jack (2010) argues that higher education promotes self-reliance and voice. Higher education is particularly important for refugee and resettled women as it gives them the tools needed to ultimately contest gendered power relations. Crea's (2016) study shows students who are involved in higher education programs express feelings of empowerment and expanded worldviews. Even in the short-term, higher education can contribute to "increased dignity for refugees" (Crea, 2016, p. 19). This notion of being connected into a broader community (through 'expanded worldviews') is picked up by scholars who more closely examine the links between education, citizenship, and globalization.

Zeus (2011) highlights the perceived contradiction of refugee higher education, where schooling is traditionally believed to be dependent on the existence of a nation-state. However, Farah's (2010) case study in the SADR shows how education is used as a tool to instill new traditions of citizenship and to create a new imagined national community in the SADR. She argues that education in this context has significant political implications, as it blurs the demarcation between 'refugee' and 'citizen'. Peterson (2010) examines how resettlement via higher education programs can also lead to a heightened sense of nationalism vis-à-vis the roles of globalization and transnational networks in education and citizenship (he examines the role of an African-centric Canadian-based website called 'Radio NILO', for example). Anselme & Hands (2010) underscore the importance of curriculum development in creating nation-specific education to the suit the needs of refugees, a to-date unexplored area of research.

The literature draws various linkages between students' motivations for higher education and family. El Jack (2010) examines how in the absence of family, education becomes even

more significant in developing important life skills, like self-reliance. In Farah's (2010) case study of the SADR, "education was viewed as the means to redeem families from poverty and the nation from occupation" (p. 34). Donald's (2014) analysis of young people in Dzaleka camp in Malawi points to the perceived importance of higher education not just in their lives, but also for the socioeconomic betterment of their families' lives.

### **Unequal gender and power relations**

Speaking more generally about power relations in humanitarianism, Harrell-Bond (2002) discusses how the systems created by humanitarianism, and the representations of refugees therein, mean that refugees themselves are then expected to play certain roles to be successful in receiving aid. Two distinct, but related, narratives constitute these power dynamics: that of the good, deserving refugee and that of the ungrateful, bad refugee. Malkki (1996) and Harrell-Bond (2002) both underscore the ways in which representations rely on gender and age: depictions of the 'good refugee' center on women and children, underscoring an expectation of a certain kind of helplessness. These discursive and gendered portrayals are closely tied to the mobility of refugees: whether they are in camps or in urban environments. Much of these two intertwined discourses rest on a metaphysics of sedentarism. Hyndman & Giles (2011) argue that those who stay 'in place' in either camps or in countries in the global South are deemed 'safe' and those 'on the move' are coded as dangerous, contributing to the feminization of asylum.

More specifically on higher education, scholarship highlights gender as a key barrier in accessing higher education. Anselme & Hands (2010) argue that even though structural barriers affect all potential students, these barriers more severely affect women and girls. Peterson (2010), too, discusses structural barriers that lead to a gender gap in the proportion of women and men students in World University Service of Canada's (WUSC) student refugee program. El

Jack (2010) highlights the unequal levels of success for South Sudanese refugee women and girls in higher education, both in situations of protracted displacement and in resettlement. Barriers include unequal opportunities for girls and boys at the primary and secondary levels of education, and again highlight the need to approach education holistically (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). Anselme & Hands (2010); Dippo, Orgocka & Giles (2013); and Wright & Plaster (2010), too, all examine how socio-cultural barriers prevent women from enrolling in formal schooling.

While much research has been done on exploring student motivations for higher education, El Jack (2010) offers a gendered analysis that highlights how for South Sudanese women, education becomes the driving motivating factor to success. Clark-Kazak (2010) examines the gendered differences in the perceived value of higher education among women and men: women see education as being able to open up opportunities in the family and household spheres, while men look for opportunities in community and policy spaces.

At the heart of higher education for refugees scholarship in connection to development studies is the drive to contest and transform unequal power relations. Clark-Kazak (2010) examines the impact of education on power relations within families, households, and communities. However, she points out that higher education's impact on power relations does not necessarily extend to high-level politics, and may not lead to the tangible economic and political benefits that many of the Congolese she interviewed hoped for. As well, education can create new cleavages in communities, as seen in the way in which educated Congolese self-identify as 'intellectuals' to distinguish themselves from uneducated Congolese (Clark-Kazak, 2010). Wright & Plaster (2010) discuss how language learning in ethnically and linguistically diverse camp settings in Kenya can help in conflict resolution, but they do not explain how new power relations may be formed or existing ones reproduced. These unintended consequences

come more clearly to the fore in Zeus' (2011) review of the Thai-Burma border, where Karen leadership has tended to reinforce traditional power structures instead of embracing ethnic diversity in institutions. These intricate power relations should be more critically analyzed from gendered perspectives.

One way to do so might be to better highlight the need to understand different socio-economic, cultural, and political factors in the provision of higher education (Anselme & Hands, 2010). While Crea's (2016) study paid little attention to the role of gender, it did provide a comprehensive breakdown of student experience by site, pointing to the importance of understanding the differences between camp and urban challenges for students. Donald (2014) argues higher education can challenge power relations by allowing students to 'self-author' their own development.

### **Gaps and future steps**

The newness of the field of higher education for refugees has meant that the literature to date is limited. A significant amount of research has been conducted in the past ten years. Nonetheless, this field is still burgeoning. Given the newness of the topic, work has focused on rationales for higher education for refugees, barriers to access, and project implementation (see Anselme & Hands [2010], Dryden-Peterson [2010], and Wright & Plasterer [2010], for example). Work done on student experiences with higher education is extremely limited (however, see Crea [2016] for one recent study on student perceptions). I align myself with scholars like Clark-Kazak (2010) and El Jack (2010), who center their research on the voices of individuals in exile. Most of the higher education for refugee projects to date have been implemented in Kenya and Thailand. More specifically, these projects are implemented in

camps. This thesis on higher education in Amman, Jordan, expands our knowledge of both the literature and the geographical contexts of higher education for refugees through its focus on an under-researched country and an urban setting.

Given the large numbers of individuals in protracted displacement<sup>15</sup>, the extremely low likelihood of refugee resettlement, and the unwillingness of host countries to allow refugees to work in the local markets, research that goes beyond the economic implications of higher education for refugees is important. A deeper exploration of student experiences – beyond vaguely used terms like ‘increased empowerment’ – is needed to more critically understand the potentially transformative aspects of higher education in the lived experiences of students. Higher education can be used as a tool to both contest and also reinforce existing power relations, and these diverse and often contradictory ends must be more carefully understood. As well, while it is well established in the literature that women experience more barriers than men to participating in higher education, research does not delve into how gendered differences manifest in the student experience. As well, other differences among students – such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, dis/ability and socio-economic status – must be considered in the design and implementation of research.

In the chapter that follows I analyze the data that was gathered for this thesis in Amman, Jordan. Based on that data, chapter 3 begins by addressing humanitarian refugee history and politics in the Jordanian context. There are two main areas that arise from my fieldwork data that are explored in that chapter and they concern the relationship between i) agency; and ii) alternative narratives of community and home.

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<sup>15</sup> See Crawford et al. (2015) for a more detailed discussion on patterns and trends in protracted displacement.



## CHAPTER 3: HUMANITARIANISM AND EDUCATION

### **Introduction**

The uptake of higher education by refugees challenges discursive representations that are depoliticizing and dehistoricizing by giving an avenue to students through which they can connect to their own pasts and futures, while also transforming their present lived experiences. However, students also experienced racialized and gendered barriers and differences in their ability to use education as a tool of empowerment. In this chapter, I begin by demonstrating that education in exile that is context-driven (i.e. is attentive to the lived experiences of the students) provides them with better tools for responding to those humanitarian practices that ignore their history, deny their agency, and obscure their future. Every day students maneuver within the confines of humanitarianism at the school centre and in Jordan more generally. The second part of the chapter addresses racialized and gendered experiences that many of interviewed students confront in the city beyond the school centre. In the third part of this chapter, I examine these complex experiences to the case study of community- and home- making at the school. Despite these challenges, in the final part of this chapter, I go on to argue that higher education in Jordan can ultimately be an avenue of empowerment for students by allowing for a process of continuity between their pasts *and* futures, while also opening possibilities to transform the present.

### **Contextualizing humanitarian education in exile**

Brun (2016) argues that humanitarian systems<sup>16</sup> “defuturize” the lives of refugees by focusing on saving biological lives, and that these practices empty individuals in exile of their

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<sup>16</sup> Brun (2016) defines the humanitarian system as “the actors that are linked in some functional

biographical lives. By ‘biographical life’, she means a life that goes beyond mere survival and entails a multiplicity of imagined possibilities for the future. These defuturized humanitarian systems decontextualize the lives of those in exile by disconnecting them from their futures. On the other hand, Zeus (2011) argues that the very uptake of higher education in protracted refugee situations signals a shift in humanitarian practice towards recognizing refugees as capable agents who can contribute to their own development. This recognition, then, “would facilitate dismantling the power structures from within, as they are sustained in great part by the narrative of refugees as victims” (Zeus, 2011, p. 270). That is, the very act of participation in higher education signals a process of change towards new representations by refugee students.

Drawing on the work of these two scholars, I argue that the uptake of higher education by refugee students creates new avenues through which they can break out of a dehistoricizing present imposed by humanitarian practices. While Brun (2016) focuses on possibilities for futures, I more generally consider the ways in which higher education can allow a process of continuity between students’ pasts *and* futures, while also opening possibilities to transform the present.

Among the students that I spoke to in Amman, it was rare for RSC to be their first experience with post-secondary education. For those who hadn’t previously studied at a post-secondary level, higher education had nevertheless been an ambition pre-migration, a goal that they had been actively pursuing. As Brun (2016) reminds us, regardless of humanitarian practices, individuals in exile do always experience some kind of movement in their lives.

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ways to each other across multiple scales to constitute the local/global humanitarian architecture” (p. 395).

Higher education, then, serves as a lens through which these movements and connections with pasts and futures can be seen and understood. Amir, for example, says:

I don't like to be not enrolled in any educational program because I don't like to feel that I am away from education, not talking with people who are enrolled in education. So I always feel that I need to be close to education and people who are in this field. (Amir, Syrian, 19)

Amir reflects on a lifelong desire to be part of communities and spaces centered on education. Upon arrival in Jordan, he worked for a year at a car repair shop, but was not fulfilled by this role. His continuation of higher education is significant not only in its ability to change current lived circumstances but also in its connection to a larger narrative of education in his life.

For Ali, whose migration and education histories are particularly complex, this trajectory is even more marked. After leaving Somalia at the age of 3, he and his family first sought asylum in Kenya, living there for 19 years. After returning to Somalia and living there for less than a year, he migrated again to Yemen – staying there for less than 2 years – and then to Jordan. Despite these numerous interruptions, Ali pursued higher education and related career aspirations in all of these countries. Thus, the very pursuit of education in Jordan connects these different experiences that are spread out over multiple countries, creating a very different representation that contests the dehistoricizing ones. In the same way, Ali's current education in Jordan is connected to a future trajectory of education related aspirations:

For the future goals, first, maybe, I will do community [work] that offers education or maybe train teachers who would do reforms in education systems in Somalia and other countries or in areas that we find useful. (Ali, Somalian, 27)

Education in the context of displacement in Jordan creates continuity with past experiences, as well as future aspirations. Brun (2016) reminds us that, even though humanitarian practices do not make way for the future for those in exile, the people living in displacement nonetheless plan for their futures, even in uncertainty. This finding speaks to the

work of Donald (2014), whose central argument is that young people in Dzaleka camp in Malawi view higher education as a way to prepare for an uncertain future. The students at RSC, too, use higher education strategically in ways that speak to futures that they are preparing for. Notably, in the face of uncertainty about future plans or resettlement, all students viewed English language learning as a key motivation for joining the program. Fadi (Iraqi, 20), for example, “thought about improving [his] English in Jordan, so when [he goes] to another country, it won’t be difficult for [him] to continue [his] education”. Amina was also motivated to learn English for its value in helping her make strategic long-term choices:

Like, I said to myself, if you learn English language and you become perfect, you can find a scholarship through some websites, and you can easily go through an exam as long as you are good in English (Amina, Somalian, 26).

Four students, as well, were motivated to enroll in RSC to learn about American university systems as a means of preparing for university education in the future after resettling. Students, then, use education strategically in diverse ways to plan for their futures.

A number of researchers examine the link between higher education and family. In El Jack’s (2010) study of South Sudanese refugee women and girls, participants often repeated the proverb “education is my mother and father”. This proverb was used to signal the ways in which schooling serves to create stability in the absence of a stable family life. Donald (2014) examines how education aspirations of young people are linked to a desire to contribute to the betterment of their families’ lives. Here, I examine how the very *fostering* of educational aspirations are linked with students’ family histories. Abdul says of his reasons for pursuing education in Jordan:

Yeah, my mom is my motivation. She’s always motivating, she’s always telling me I should study. Education is very important, because she is a teacher, that’s why (Abdul, Sudanese, 26).

Thus, pursuing education in Jordan becomes a continuation of a family goal and connects students to their own histories and families – histories and families that are often denied by humanitarian structures. This is particularly salient for students who are in Jordan by themselves, without families, as is the case with Abdul. For Taifa, too, family motivations to pursue education create a buffer against widespread racism in the Jordanian public school systems. This relationship between higher education and family builds on Donald’s (2014) research with young people in Dzaleka camp, who speak about how family can contribute to students’ self-motivations to pursue education. Donald’s research, however, looks at family in the context of exile (that is, young people interviewed in this research speak only of their family members within Dzaleka camp). In this context, however, ‘family’ can be transnational – Abdul’s mother, for example, lives in a refugee camp in Kenya. The pursuit of education, then, is an avenue through which students reconnect the present with the past, from which they may have experienced a radical break.

The provision of higher education in exile (mediated through RSC), then, is part of a potential shift in humanitarian practices to a system that is more responsive to the futures of refugees. This section has also highlighted how even within a system (i.e. humanitarianism) that restricts a “future orientation” (Brun, 2016, p. 399) among the people it purports to serve, some refugees are able to access and use resources that coincide with their own goals – not those of humanitarianism. In the following subsection, the humanitarian focus turns to the workers who staff the school centre.

### **Humanitarian actors at RSC**

As discussed in chapter 2, despite a move towards a rights-based approach in development and humanitarian practices, humanitarian practices remain entrenched in unequal

power relations, both locally and globally. Belloni (2007) argues that humanitarianism both originates from and reproduces these unequal global power relations. In the context of forced migration, Harrell-Bond (2002) and Malkki (1996) highlight how humanitarian practices reproduce power dynamics where refugees are expected to perform particular representations in order to receive aid. This body of literature is the starting point for this section, where I interrogate the relationships between humanitarian actors or workers and refugee students in the RSC school centre. Higher education, through this lens, can also function as a way to make the students at the school legible to the international humanitarian community. In this context, the power of higher education functions as a way to shift representation of refugees from an undistinguishable mass to one that is intelligible to the humanitarian community and the neoliberal world at large.

The physical separation of the RSC school from its surroundings allowed for students to practice homemaking there in ways they weren't able to do in other parts of Jordan (discussed further below in this chapter). However, this separation also turned the school into a place of Americanization. The RSC centre itself, beyond the students who attend, is filled with Canadian and British expatriate staff members, American priests who live in the residential area of the RSC headquarters; and international visitors who would filter in and out of the centre on various trips to Amman. Even the extracurricular activities that happened at the school would often reflect western perspectives. A weekly 'refugee themed' movie screening at the school included films like *Hotel Rwanda*, featuring American perspectives on global inequities. One day, I came to the school to find several of the students sitting on the benches, engaged in conversation with various English-speaking priests who had come to Jordan for a conference. And, of course, I, too, would have been unable to meet and interview the students that I did without the facilitation

of RSC. These processes, in different ways, render the students at RSC legible to various western institutions.

In more overt ways, the space of the school also makes students legible to international humanitarian actors. Staff members at the school, for example, help students with applications for the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), a private sponsorship program for refugees. The Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT), a Catholic based private sponsorship program identifies potential refugees for sponsorship at the school and conducts interviews in that very location.

These western influences may lead to the reproduction of particular modes of communication and representation. ‘Language learning’ as an education process is a doubly loaded term at RSC that involves both learning the English language and learning a particular style of non-verbal communication that is deemed ‘western’ (an interpretation I borrow from a staff person at RSC, discussed further below).

While in the first section of this chapter I discussed English language learning as a strategy for preparing for the future, here I examine English language learning as a means of coping with present realities. The very act of learning English, the predominant language of USA, Canada, and Australia (the countries most sought after for resettlement by refugee students), is often a baseline through which students are able to represent themselves in the most basic way to people, communities, and institutions from these countries who do not speak their native languages. Indeed, for almost every student I talked to, a key motivation for entering the diploma program was to improve his or her English, *despite* the fact that the diploma is not an English learning program. Ahmad speaks to this central motivation for him in entering the diploma program:

When I start[ed], my English, it wasn't that good ... So when I came here, I was searching for something to study and improve my English, especially speaking. (Ahmad, Sudanese, 28)

The act of learning English is crucial in representation to the international humanitarian community, as it was very common to meet humanitarian actors in Jordan who did not speak Arabic, to say nothing of other languages students at the school spoke, such as Assyrian and Somali. To be able to speak the language of these actors would create an avenue for legibility that would not exist otherwise. However, the explicit English 'language learning' is only the first, more superficial level of English learning. On this topic, a key informant from RSC speaks specifically to the nature of communication students have with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representatives:

... with training in communication and in western culture that students just do better in interviews, *western* style interviews ... Whether or not it's necessarily a great thing, that's something we kind of train people to be able to do when preparing an academic argument. There's lots of transferable skills. (RSC representative 2)

The key informant argues that skills linked to academic writing increase the students' abilities to represent themselves to refugee status determination officers at UNHCR. However, this process of representation goes beyond learning 'academic' skills like essay writing, and is embedded in the very curriculum of the diploma program. When speaking on the value of the Interpersonal Communication course, Ali highlights the process of learning non-Somalian styles of body language:

We [Somalians] have difficulty in communication. ... Also the use of body language. There were many body language that I was using without any reason. So it was a turning point. [I learned] to be more formal ... and to be more professional, when you are using the body language, when you are standing, the posture, everything. (Ali, Somalian, 27)



His description of Somalians as having difficulty in communicating is striking. The implication of grouping together Somalians is that these difficulties only come into play in intercultural forms of communication. These differences may be particularly pronounced with western humanitarian actors. Thus, the process of education at RSC teaches him new forms of communication that are more palatable to western tastes. Changing communication styles is also viewed as a conscious process, underscoring how the diploma program is the means through which these forms of communication are gained.

Representation, therefore, to the humanitarian community in Jordan is a process of learning *re-representation*, of the active and conscious decision to learn not just the English language, but to learn particular ways of communication. Through these acts, the students render themselves legible both to the humanitarian actors they interact with and the institutions that these actors are a part of.

Moving outward from the school, the students who I interviewed had much to say about racialized and gendered politics of recognition in the city of Amman. As I discuss below, these experiences challenged the students' sense of continuity with the past and their struggle to develop a future-mindedness.

### **Racialized and gendered challenges to higher education**

Sen's (1999) landmark work on the "capabilities approach" examines how both processes and opportunities must be taken into account to understand how individuals are able to have what he refers to as capability or effective freedom. Nussbaum (1999), drawing on his work, writes that resource-based approaches that focus on individual's resources ignore "that individuals vary in their ability to convert resources into functionings" (p. 232) (i.e. actual

achievements). Thus, it is important to understand “not just about the resources that are present, but about how those do or do not go to work, enabling [individuals] to function” (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 233). Using this analysis as my starting point, I examine students’ racialized and gendered experiences, particularly the ways in which this affected their abilities to convert resources into achievements.

Every Sudanese and Somalian student I spoke with highlighted the particularly intense racialized barriers their communities faced in Jordan. Hazim says:

I think others [non-Sudanese refugees], yeah, they face problems, but the kind of problems they face are different. Because you know, Sudanese are 100% black, so to be black in a city like Amman is very difficult for them. ... [For Arab refugees], many [of] their big challenges is how to manage their lives in terms of work, in terms of education. But for me, it’s in terms of ... how to live, how to forget about the words that people say. Even sometimes they physically attack, so how to overcome these problems. (Hazim, Sudanese, 27)

Hazim’s quotation highlights several of the difficulties many Sudanese and Somalian students spoke to me about while I was in Jordan. The Sudanese community, particularly, was seen to be more vulnerable by key informants I spoke to at RSC. The larger population of Sudanese in Jordan compared to Somalians made them more visible to the Jordanian government. As well, Sudanese people in Jordan were primarily single men, while Somalians in Jordan were more often comprised of families. I was told that more resources were available to families (which included children and women) than to single men. As well, the deportations in Jordan in December 2015 had increased feelings of insecurity in the Sudanese community. All of these factors combined to make the lives of Sudanese students extremely precarious. Somalians, who are often not native Arabic speakers, also face their own unique barriers in daily life in Jordan, as Ali points out:

Somali people are suffering more and more than other people. ... Lack of education, because ignorance is killing us. Language barriers. Most of the Somali

people do not speak second language. They just speak Somali language so there's no way they can get their rights because they don't know. (Ali, Somalian, 27)

These barriers can decrease students' feelings of agency, such as their ability to utilize their education strategically in Jordan ("The problem is psychology. [Sudanese] are not interested in living here in Jordan, so how to push themselves to come to the school or to the centre?" [Hazim, Sudanese, 27]). Abdul, for example, after I asked if he felt education had any impact in his life currently, responds:

Right now? You know, we're in a different country. We live with a difficult community. This community, I think, nothing can be worked with them, except ignoring them. You won't apply anything you're studying with these people, it's not going to work. Forget it. (Abdul, Sudanese, 26)

He views the value of RSC, then, as an "information session": knowledge gained "to [be used] for another place, another culture". Abdul, as well, is Christian, creating further potential points of friction with the sociocultural environment of Jordan. In contrast, Reza, who is Syrian, does not find place to be a barrier in exercising agency:

I don't actually care where I am ... I started reading and getting more into psychology, and especially I adopted this mentality of the humans are radically free. That we always have a choice. We can do something good wherever you are. Wherever we are. It doesn't depend on the place, it depends on the person. So now I don't mind being in Jordan or anywhere else. (Reza, Syrian, 25)

Reza's view of "the human as radically free" as a framework for his own lived experiences is an opposing perspective to Abdul's. Reza's focus on choice highlights how he views his own agency in the Jordanian context. Reza, as well, has access to a wider range of social networks than most students I met with: his sister had immigrated to Jordan for marriage before the Syrian war began, and helped connect him with various NGOs in Amman. Thus, Abdul and Reza had markedly different experiences in being able to use their education to exercise agency in the Jordanian context.

Prior to conducting fieldwork, I was most interested in understanding the ways in which women and men have different, gendered experiences with higher education. However, gender was rarely brought up as a topic of discussion by students, who would instead tell me that it was not a significant factor in their experiences at RSC. Gender was overshadowed by conversations of nationality. As well, among my interview sample, I was only able to interview 3 women (as opposed to 10 men). This difference reflects the relatively few women students enrolled at school. Despite the recognized need among RSC staff members to support women in education, many women at RSC drop out of the program. In the 2014 cohort, for example, only 7 of the original 25 students were female (JRS, 2016). Of these, 4 had dropped out (none because of resettlement), and of the remaining 3, only one was regularly involved in the school's community life (JRS, 2016).

However, there were still gendered differences in student experiences. Women and men at RSC utilize higher education for different aims. Women are more interested in protection and self-sufficiency. While men students also were motivated by education helping them get better jobs, relating to 'self-sufficiency', the emergence of the theme of 'respect' was unique in interviews with men. My interviews demonstrate that, first of all, women had relatively fewer options for creating social networks than men. Thus education was more valuable for women in terms of generating new social networks, and therefore greater levels of agency. The kinds of social capital that can be gained through different networks are understood by scholars to contribute to individuals' and communities' economic and social advancement, and to offset different forms of marginalization and vulnerability (Edwards, 2009; Willis, 2005). Social networks, then, can be used to give women students different forms of agency from men. Second, I found that women experience gendered barriers in using education to reach particular

outcomes, such as resettlement. Thus, the ability of women students to convert the capabilities gained from education into actual achievement (e.g. resettlement or employment) are particularly complex in gendered ways. On the topic of social networks and education in Iraq, Maryam says:

Yeah, [in] the areas that require a lot of contact with people, girls' chances decrease because it's not really common for girls to have the freedom to do whatever they can there. (Maryam, Iraqi, 24)

Thus, for Maryam, part of her motivation to pursue higher education is the lack of other options that she, as a woman, could access when in Iraq. She also pointed to the desire for independence as a driving motivation for higher education, adding:

I want to depend on myself. I want to find a job, and like, help myself, support myself financially, because I don't know, as a female in Iraq, you can't have any job that you dream of. (Maryam, Iraqi, 24)

Amina, too, discusses this point, when reflecting on why higher education is important for her:

Maybe because I am alone. Like I have no family, so I consider education is my protection. The more I educate myself, the more I will be familiar for my rights, the more I can protect myself with education. (Amina, Somalian, 26)

While I discussed family as a key motivating factor for students earlier in this chapter, here the absence of family also motivates Amina to pursue education. For Maryam and Amina, higher education is closely tied to self-sufficiency and protection. This particular value that they ascribed to higher education was not present in interviews I had with men at the school. In those interviews, one theme that emerged was respect. Abdul, for example, reflects on how education leads can lead to respect in one's community:

When I think myself among any community, I always think that I am the first one, and others came behind me. I challenge myself to be a good one among any community. That's why I try to spend my time. (Abdul, Sudanese, 26)

Ali, too, ties higher education to getting better jobs, and getting more respect. This is in contrast to jobs in the informal sector, which he says get "no respect at all" (Ali, Somalian, 27).

Family ties, whether transnational or local, and the bonds of community that the students established at RSC served as a crucial counter to the alienation that they experienced in the streets of Amman. In the following section, I explore these ties and the ways in which students practiced community- and homemaking at RSC.

### **Community and cosmopolitanism at RSC**

“At RSC I feel the diversity. It is like a refugee community, from different places around from the Middle East.” (Amir, Syrian, 19)

In this section, I draw on Limbu’s conception of the refugee as the ideal cosmopolitan figure to interrogate possibilities of new citizenship in the student community at RSC. The new forms of community that open up at RSC offer opportunities to radically reimagine sedentary assumptions of ‘refugeeness’. Limbu (2009), in looking for “alternative narratives that provide different perspectives on the refugee experience”, draws on notions of cosmopolitanism as a means of “reimagining the refugees as the exemplary cosmopolitan subject” (p. 265).

Cosmopolitanism refers to a “sense of belonging that goes beyond one’s immediate community and the concomitant idea of moral obligations owed to others separated by customs, distance, and citizenship” (Limbu, 2009, p. 258).

This redrawing of the refugee as the exemplary cosmopolitan subject is, in the context of RSC, closely tied to processes of homemaking and community-building at the school centre. Here, I draw on Brun & Fabos’ (2015) conceptualization of ‘home’ as a “triadic constellation” – ‘home’, ‘Home’, and ‘HOME’, discussed further below in this section – as a way through which cosmopolitanism is fostered at RSC. Significantly, the processes of homemaking at RSC “[unsettle] static notions of home and displacement”, and reconfigure bonds of community and

solidarity that utilize shared feelings of displacement and exile (p. 5). Brun & Fabos (2015) point out how “key features of many narratives of forced migration within a sedentary metaphysics of the ‘national order of things’ have included the narrative of home as elsewhere, refugees as out of place, and the close association and inseparable bond between home and homeland” (p. 8). Their drawing on home as a triadic constellation unsettles these fixed and limiting assumptions. Additionally, Hyndman & Giles (2017), drawing on Giddens’ earlier work, define ontological security as “a lived sense of safety with a degree of certainty underwriting it” (p. 17). In the context of protracted displacement, “it is demarcated as much by its absence as its presence” (p. 17). They argue that “new forms of home” can act as a protection against ontological insecurity.

The notion of the Brazilian “citizen school” can be helpful here (Gadotti & Torres, 2014). Drawing on Freire’s (1970) pedagogical approaches, Gadotti & Torres (2014) highlight how the citizen school “does not simply impart knowledge, but creates and administers knowledge” (p. 7). Intrinsically linked with this conceptualization of education is the citizen school as a space “where knowledge and freedom are produced in common” for the aim of fostering citizenship building for all people, but particularly those who have been marginalized (Gadotti & Torres, 2014, p. 8). This point is reflected in Hazim’s reflection on the kinds of peer-to-peer education that occurs at RSC:

If I have problem or I face any kind of difficulties, I call one of my classmates and ask him. ... Fortunately, we are from very different fields and backgrounds, one of us is engineer, one of us is teacher, one of us is geologist... (Hazim, Sudanese, 27)

Implicit in this process of peer-to-peer education is the bringing of previous educational and professional experiences to the new ‘citizen school’ classroom of RSC. As discussed in the chapter 1, RSC functions as an online diploma program where the same university courses from an American university are offered at multiple sites around the world. These locations have

diverse historical, political, and social contexts, ranging from Afghanistan to Kenya to Malawi. One salient critique of the RSC program, then, is its application of one western curriculum to the diverse needs of communities in exile around the world. This delivery of material speaks to a blueprint approach to development, where one singular ‘solution’ is presented to a range of politically, socially, historically, and culturally specific ‘problems’ (Harrison, 2005). Such a neoliberal approach to education is “caught in a universal present” that allows for its applicability to any historical, political, or social context (Harrison, 2005, p. 1314). These tensions were visible at RSC. Several students identified religion as a difficult subject to traverse in the Jordanian context, creating challenges and barriers during the religion course: “When he talk about religion, and you are from different religions, that might lead you to big troubles” (Abdul, Sudanese, 26).

While this critique must be explored in understanding the role of higher education programs, it is also important to understand how even a ‘blueprint’ curriculum is transformed into something particular about the RSC location in Jordan by the students who are in the program. The curriculum, then, is impacted by the experiences, interests, and histories of students. The academic peer-to-peer support by students about course materials relies on their own histories. Even simple practices of discussing the communication styles of their home countries – a frequent topic of conversation in the Interpersonal Communication course – highlight these processes.

The notion of a citizen school in this context, is closely tied to processes of homemaking. Thus, school and home overlap for students at RSC:

I consider RSC my first home, because when I [finish] from work, I don’t go home. I come here, I eat here, I study here. Even if I’m not studying, you saw me so many times, sitting out [on the benches], and chilling out. (Amina, Somalian,



Brun & Fabos (2015) disrupt representations of individuals in exile that are rooted in sedentarism by considering how homemaking processes function during displacement and allow for the conceptualization of multiple homes. They identify three elements to this framework: ‘home’ as “the day-to-day practices of homemaking”; ‘Home’ as the “values, traditions, memories, and feelings of home”; and ‘HOME’ as the “broader political and historical contexts” (p. 5) (authors’ upper-case). Homemaking at the school was a continual practice that came from students picking paint colours and decorating the new classroom at the school (see image 3.1 for a photo of the old classroom, with student-made posters on the wall), having potlucks to celebrate the breaking of fast during Ramadan, and playing cards at night after classes had ended. Brun & Fabos (2015) write that homemaking is a temporally and spatially fluid process that happens even in exile. The students’ homemaking practices represent a claiming of the education centre as a home, despite the Jordanian governmental policy that does not recognize refugees outside of a guest/host framework; for this reason, I argue that their practices are inherently political.



**Image 3.1: Photo shows one of the classrooms at the RSC school, which are also used as a space for community events and independent student study. Photo courtesy of Maher Ghalyoun.**

Homemaking created a sense of security among students. These feelings of security were especially pronounced for Sudanese and Somalian students, for whom the school was a marked contrast from everyday life in Jordan:

RSC for me is like my home. I feel secure when I am at RSC. We never ever feel secure when we are on the street or even the workplace. So sometimes [on the street or in the workplace] you hear words that you don't like to hear. (Hakim, Sudanese, 25)

For students like Hakim, whose precarious status as a refugee is characterized by experiences of public racialization, the RSC student community acts as a kind of protection in a city where a proliferation of attention is currently given to Syrians. Thus, RSC gains extra salience as a protective site for Sudanese and Somalian refugees given the scarcity of NGO resources they can access. As well, while all of the Syrian and Iraqi students I spoke with lived with family members in Amman, none of the Sudanese students I spoke with had any family in Jordan. One

of the three Somalian students, as well, lived in Jordan without family. This suggests possibilities for building on El Jack's (2010) work, where she argues that education gains extra importance in refugees' lives as a means of creating stability in the absence of a stable family life.

The students' processes of homemaking and community building extend beyond the RSC school centre in Jordan. Limbu's (2009) redrawing of the refugee as the exemplary cosmopolitan figure highlights the notion of being a 'citizen of the world'. This world citizenship is intrinsically tied up in the creation of the community at RSC. The very creation of community at RSC, both in the classroom and online, signals new bonds of solidarity that underscore the value of refugee students coming together. The very existence of the RSC school brings together refugee students of different nationalities, religions, and backgrounds who would not have had these avenues to build relationships otherwise. Fadi (Iraqi, 20), for example, says: "It's very nice. We met a lot of different cultures, people, from Sudan, Somalia, from Syria, Jordan, Iraq."

Beyond this, however, students can develop relationships with one another outside of Jordan. Reza's definition of community below opens up the role of technology in community making:

[It] is a place where there are people and they are connected to each other. They're not just people staying in one place physically, but they are actually mentally connected with each other. So this was the case here. (Reza, Syrian, 25)

Refugee students at RSC have an extraordinarily higher rate of resettlement than the average refugee in the world<sup>17</sup>, which is quoted as less than 1% (UNHCR, 2015b). As of June

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<sup>17</sup> This fact was brought to my attention by several RSC key informants (RSC representative 1; RSC instructor 1; RSC instructor 2). However, only one student discussed this improved likelihood of resettlement as a motivating factor in pursuing higher education at RSC. Because this research foregrounds the voices of the interviewed students, I have not focused on resettlement options as a key part of students' experiences with RSC. Nonetheless, this is an important area for future research.

2016, the 2014 diploma cohort has had a 44% rate of resettlement, and the 2015 cohort has had a 20% rate (JRS, 2016). The departure of students can create feelings of absence in the remaining physical community at RSC as Amir says: “Most of the people I used to study with left ... and that makes me feel less interested [in the program]” (Amir, Syrian, 20). However, students also maintain community bonds transnationally. Taifa, for example, told me she is still in touch via Whatsapp with two former classmates who resettled. The transnational potential of RSC as imagining a ‘global refugee community’ is also seen through the online connections between the multiple locations of RSC delivery around the world:

Outside Jordan, I have different relationships [with students] in Malawi, and I haven’t been in Malawi. Through the discussion board we have a lot of students who are different from different parts of the world. So in Malawi I have a friend who taught me about the situation there and I told him about the situation here. (Abdul, Sudanese, 26)

Hazim, who, reflecting on the utility of the higher education program at RSC, says:

The diploma is based on very international point of view, and I think right now, all the world is going to be international, all the countries, everywhere, every place. Like, we’ll be just like one state. Everyone knows everything about everyone, everywhere, so I think diploma is giving me this sense of being international person. (Hazim, Sudanese, 27)

This idea of a “one state” world gestures towards the possibilities of world citizenship<sup>18</sup>.

These shared links are still burgeoning despite the difficulties students have in finding the time to come to the centre to complete their studies, let alone spend additional time talking to others on the message boards. As well, for many students, the diploma was their first time using computers, and they spent much time in the first year just getting comfortable using English

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<sup>18</sup> Limbu (2009) is reticent about pinning down an exact definition of cosmopolitanism or world citizenship (two terms which he occasionally uses interchangeably), but I use ‘world citizenship’ as a way of highlighting an “increasing connectedness” among individuals that goes beyond either one’s nation-state or immediate geographic location (p. 259).

keyboards. Nonetheless, the potential for the formation of transnational bonds of solidarity was present and gestures to possible future communities.

A shared sense of ‘refugeeness’ ties the students together. However, the pursuit of the common goal of education is also central in developing this community – “The students [are] acting like one community, with their differences and different backgrounds, and education is what brings them together” (Taifa, Somalian, 21). This signals the need to move away from only understanding ‘refugees’ in terms of their displacement. The shared experience of exile is central in the development of a community at RSC. However, several students also pointed to how education is what brings them together, and gives them a shared sense of purpose and achievement. This shared purpose contributes to the ability of a community to form, despite what students discussed as some barriers in the process:

Yeah, of course it was hard at the beginning. This is because all of us, we had like single story - but after we spent a couple months, and we know each other, we were different. (Ahmad, Sudanese, 28)

Ahmad’s use of the term “single story” draws on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TED Talk on how preconceptions of others ‘fix’ them into particular characteristics or roles. This concept parallels my own discussion in chapter 2 on how humanitarian work ‘fixes’ refugees into these same kinds of static roles. Ahmad’s analysis of Adichie’s ‘single story’ narrative in his own lived experiences clearly demonstrates the value of higher education – the space where he learned of this approach – in transforming his perspectives and changing the very conditions of his lived experiences. Students move beyond these single stories by emphasizing their commonalities, particularly that of a shared education – “Education is the thing [we have most in common]” (Taifa, Somalian, 21).

Hazim points to the constant fluidity of his thoughts and perspectives in the program, and how this relates to his past experiences:

My way of dealing with the problems and issues has been changed. ... I used to deal with issues from my own perspectives just, and I didn't call it selfishness, but I realize after that it is selfishness. ... It made me after that think of everyone's points of view. (Hazim, Sudanese, 27)

However, even as education serves to build community at RSC and create new bonds of solidarity, it can also generate new power relations and boundaries in pre-existing nationality- and ethnic-based communities; for example, Ahmad feels that he is unable to connect with his Sudanese communities after enrolling in the diploma program. The communities built at RSC are built on exclusions around education lines, and create new fractures in students' other identities. That is, only students who have the ability and the language skills to participate in the diploma program can be a part of it.

There are some people in my community, they don't have this kind of awareness [i.e. critical consciousness]. I am a part of them, but I deal with people in RSC better than them. Even some of my housemates who live with me – with some issues, when they are at home, we argue or something like that. I don't know, because they are not educated or what. They are not aware. (Ahmad, Sudanese, 28)

This reflection from Ahmad speaks to Clark-Kazak's (2010) work in the context of Congolese refugees in Uganda, where educated Congolese self-identify as 'intellectuals' to distinguish themselves from uneducated Congolese. This fraying of relationships points to some of the limitations of community building at the centre. These boundaries also raise more deeply rooted questions about refugee communities in Jordan. Only certain people are able to join this community – those who have the time to come; have the financial and other resources to work fewer hours; and speak fluent enough English to take university level courses in English. While the admission process at RSC over-selects women and refugees who had not previously attained

higher education, as an attempt to overcoming gender and other inequities, many students nonetheless drop out of the program due to mental health concerns, family commitments, or work commitments.

I was not outside of the power dynamics among the students as described in an exchange I had with Ahmed in which he relayed his reasons for feeling more comfortable in the RSC community than with the Sudanese community in Jordan. He said to me:

If you argue with some Sudanese people, you can never talk to them again. For *educated people like you*, we can argue, we can fight, it's not important to have the same idea (Ahmad, Sudanese, 28). [my italics added]

From this excerpt, I understood that Ahmad was linking my positionality as an educated person with his own positionality. By grouping us both together as part of the RSC community, he was better able to emphasize his own identity as an educated person and therefore being more strongly connected to the RSC student community.

Building on the above analysis of community and cosmopolitanism at RSC, in the next section I argue that education ultimately can function as a form of empowerment for students in the Jordanian context.

### **Education as empowerment in Jordan**

Beyond connecting students with their pasts and futures, higher education also transforms the present lived experiences of students. In the context of displacement in Jordan, markers of agency like livelihood opportunities or marriage have limited utility, given the extremely

precarious circumstances of many of the individuals. Recent changes in Jordanian policy<sup>19</sup> have theoretically opened up the ability for Syrians to get work permits in Jordan. However, the efficacy of such programs is questioned, as refugees tend to work in unlegislated and unregulated sectors regardless (Patchett, 2016). This is to say nothing of the lack of international or local attention paid to refugees from other countries. Thus, I now shift attention to the ways in which students *are* able to utilize the education they are actively gaining in the context of their current lives.

Kabeer (1999) defines power as “the ability to make choices” (p. 436). Empowerment, thus entails “a process of change” that implies “gaining the ability to exercise power” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). First-order choices are highlighted as “those strategic life choices which are critical for people to live the lives they want” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). Central to this, Kabeer examines three closely connected dimensions in exercising choice: resources, agency, and achievements. While agency has traditionally been operationalized as ‘decision-making’, it “can also include “more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. It can be exercised by individuals as well as by collectivities” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). What is important is that agency “encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency, or ‘the power within’” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). This is the starting point of this section: that agency can be understood beyond physical markers. Agency here includes the ways in which students reflect and analyze on the material that they have learned, and engage with it critically.

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<sup>19</sup> In 2016, the Jordanian government announced its intention to allow up to 200,000 Syrian refugees to work legally in Jordan, and has waived their work permit application fees (Staton, 2016).



One challenge I came up against in both interviews and analysis was the difficulty students had in articulating the effects of education in current experiences. Ziyad, for example, when asked about the impacts of RSC so far on his life, says:

Every day, I have the new thoughts. ... We live in very unstable situations, so I can't decide anything, I can't say I'm improving or I'm not, or it's getting worse. I can't say. I can't judge myself. I am confused right now. (Ziyad, Iraqi, 27)

The insecurity of the present situation, and uncertainty of the future, creates an unstable foundation where Ziyad tells me he is unable to judge his own life trajectory and development. However, even within a space of heightened insecurity, agency persists in students' lives through their experiences with education.

The very act of identifying oneself as a student marks a shift in representation enacted through one's agency, I often felt uneasy referring to students as 'refugees', particularly when students at RSC asked me what my research in Jordan was about. I found this unease reflected in conversations with Reza, who here is speaking of relationships between students of different nationalities at the school:

You are like - I don't like to say this about myself or about anything, you both are "forcefully displaced", you are living in a foreign country, or like let's say, not your homeland. I still don't like to say that about myself. (Reza, Syrian, 25)

This quotation illustrates the discomfort that comes with labels 'refugee' or 'forcefully displaced' that focus on the involuntary aspect of migration. Latent in this discomfort is the fact that the students I spoke to did not *choose* this identity, but rather that it is one thrust upon them. Therefore, the very act of choosing to be a student is a practice of agency, and the women and men with whom I spoke exercised agency in enrolling and studying in the RSC diploma program. While enrolment in the diploma program was still predicated in part by being a

refugee, in choosing the identity of student they also challenge the flattened identity marker of being *only* a ‘refugee’.

‘Agency’ also manifests itself in the new academic interests found through RSC. Nine of the students reflected on how, while they had always been interested in pursuing education, they had experienced a shift in the kinds of subjects in which they were interested while in the liberal studies program at RSC. Maryam, for example, was ambivalent about her studies in medicine while in Iraq:

When I was in Iraq, I didn’t really like what I’m doing, what I’m studying. I felt like there’s something that’s not okay, but I just went through it because I just said, I have just two more years to finish, and then I will have my career. ... But when I had to leave, I was very depressed about this. I was very afraid that I would lose this chance, to work on myself. (Maryam, Iraqi, 24)

For Maryam, this decision to switch into another field of study has gendered implications, as she had told me that in Iraq, her fields of study were limited to the kinds of things that were considered acceptable for women to study. Engineering, for example, was considered an acceptable field, while law was not. While she had not yet decided what she wanted to study in the future, she was open to a number of new possibilities that she had not considered before, reflecting new potential futures that she could tap into.

Fadi, too, discussed his decision to switch his educational aspirations from pharmacy to computer science. While his aspirations to pursue pharmacy in Iraq were tied to livelihood opportunities there, his switch to computer science highlighted an internal shift: “But now my thinking has changed and I want to study something I love” (Fadi, Iraqi, 20). These shifts in aspirations are what Kabeer (1999) refers to as the power to make first-order choices, and include decisions critical to professions and livelihoods.

Hazim reflects on the importance of the higher education program in being exposed to new ideas and perspectives that he had been unaware of before:

[The diploma program] just like made me ask very simple and basic questions that I didn't ask myself. For example, who am I? What is my aim, what is my goal? The relation between my spirit and my body and my heart and my soul. So many basic things, you can say, they're very basic, but at the same time, they're very important for everyone to ask these questions for himself or herself. (Hazim, Sudanese, 27)

These self-reflections are significant, and are indicative of what Kabeer refers to as locating the 'the power within'. Such shifts are critical to the kinds of "meaning, motivation, and purpose" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438) that Hazim and others bring to their lived experiences in Jordan, and shared with me in our many meaningful exchanges in the summer of 2016 in Amman, Jordan.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have proposed that higher education can open up new avenues for alternative narratives for refugee students and I examined this proposal through a study of the experiences of students from various countries who are in exile and studying in Amman, Jordan. One of my main goals has been to demonstrate the ways in which higher education in exile can allow for the development of a process of continuity between students' pasts *and* futures, thereby opening possibilities to transform the present. In this chapter I make three final observations that arise from the analysis in this thesis: i) the multifaceted bridging or connecting aspects of higher education; ii) the relationship between higher education, agency and representation; and iii) areas for future research.

### **Bridging relief and development: Connecting to higher education**

As highlighted in the literature on current discussions of emergency education in chapter 2, an “examination of the underpinning causes of emergencies, structural and cultural violence is missing in the discussion of emergencies”, keeping the field and the people it serves occupied only with present-minded activities (Kagawa, 2005, p. 494). As well, there is a tension between the acknowledged need for participation at all levels for sustainable initiatives and the practical restraints on such practices (Kagawa, 2005). The lack of conceptual clarity in the field of education in emergencies is reflected in the dichotomy between relief and development activities: should education in emergencies be a short-term intervention or a long-term commitment? Even though education is seen increasingly as the ‘fourth pillar’ of humanitarian intervention, it is still of secondary importance among donors, with resources prioritized towards meeting basic survival needs, such as food and water (Burde et al., 2016). Refugee higher

education, with its future-mindedness, is therefore greatly challenged by the pervasive present-mindedness that characterizes most humanitarian activities.

Research on higher education for refugees underlines how higher education can serve multiple aims simultaneously. Farah (2010) looks at how higher education can serve both individual livelihood needs and nation-building projects. Wright & Plasterer (2010) examine the value of higher education in contributing to durable solutions at both individual and societal levels. This blending of goals and outcomes are significant to the ways in which higher education bridges relief and development, as it is able to serve multiple needs simultaneously. Contrary to the emphasis on each individual's right to basic education, the tendency in practice instead seems to be to portray higher education merely in terms of its externalities, through the benefits accruing to immediate and wider society, rather than as an individual right (Zeus, 2011). However, as research shows, higher education is able to do both, and may well need to in order to address both short-term and long-term needs. Zeus (2011) argues: "More than moving towards developmental efforts, the long-term nature of the refugee situation demands approaches that break out of the relief/development dichotomy and reinforce a holistic developmental approach by 'looking at the immediate in terms of the longer term'" (2011, p. 264). This bridging is central to the future of the field.

### **Agency, empowerment, and representation through higher education**

The analysis in chapter 3 underscores the complex relationships between higher education on the one hand and agency, empowerment, and representation on the other. In this context, higher education contributes to multiple goals simultaneously. As I have highlighted, agency, empowerment, and representation are interconnected and should be critically analyzed together. I examined the relationship between high education and students' temporalities through

revealing how the space that education in exile provides, allows for the flourishing of links between students' past experiences and future aspirations. Higher education, too, has immediate impacts on the lives of students while in exile. However, the racialized and gendered challenges students experience require a more nuanced examination about the role of education in exile. I have scaled up to the level of the student community at RSC to examine how students contest representations and practice agency as a collective body. Homemaking practices and the role of technology in developing transnational communities are critical. However, western humanitarian actors also exert an 'American' influence at RSC, complicating the homemaking practices by the students. Higher education in exile, then, is a dynamic process that involves multiple actors, purposes, and processes that complicate how education functions in the lives of students.

### **Future steps in research**

The purpose of this research has been to critically examine the ways in which higher education enables refugee students to renegotiate power relations within the current context of their lives in Jordan. Following the work of Hyndman & Giles (2017), I have purposely moved away from the policy-driven language that drives much of refugee studies research. I believe this avenue is a fruitful way to explore refugee higher education beyond simply focusing on economic rationales, while also highlighting the importance that education holds for students in achieving tangible outcomes like resettlement and improved livelihood opportunities.

My research has focused only on student perceptions and experiences with higher education in exile over a short period. However, the dynamics of education are complex and increasingly transnational in nature. Thus, research that moves *with* students through their global journeys and beyond their classrooms in exile, could better explore the contextual nature of education. Indeed, even among the 13 students I interviewed in summer 2016, six students have

already resettled and another three expect to shortly. Among these nine students, all are already enrolled at a university, or have aspirations to do so in the near future. Their personal journeys underscore the complex and ever-evolving narratives of education.

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